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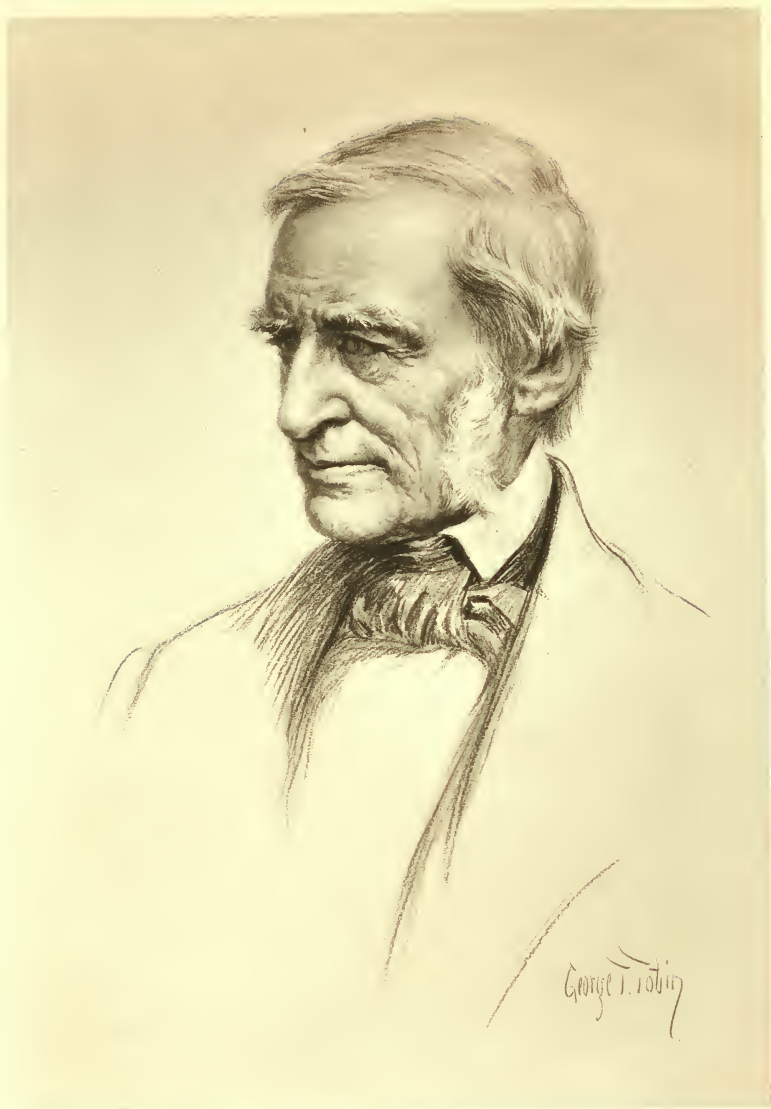
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EMERSON

POET
AND
THINKER

BY
ELISABETH
LUTHER
CARY

ILLUSTRATED

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To
MY FATHER



PREFACE.

EMERSON'S influence upon American thought has become so pervasive ; so many books embodying the modern spirit are either the direct or the indirect result of his attitude toward things of the mind, that it seems worth while to emphasise his individual message once more, even at the risk of repeating much that has been said with more authority. The readers of the present generation hardly can turn many of his pages without surprise that he so indubitably belongs to them ; that he is so freshly inspiring after half a century of rapidly changing manners and customs. His firm morality and the gracious art with which he has made morality beautiful are as valuable to-day as when his presence in the world gave a personal interest to his writings.

“What is the hardest task in the world? To think,” he somewhere says, and certainly he puts his critic to the test ; his accomplishment, apparently so simple, having a most complicated relation to his mind and temperament. But until humanity has changed its elements he will be an

object of consideration with those interested in the sources of mental and moral influences ; and my inadequate study of him will perhaps provoke one more enlightening. I have made such use as I have required of preceding accounts of him, and I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Edward Emerson and to Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Company for their kind permission to make use of extracts from Emerson's works.

ELISABETH LUTHER CARY.

BROOKLYN, October 3d, 1904.





CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—EARLY YEARS	I
II.—PREPARATION	18
1. III.—RELIGION	34
IV.—NATURE	57
V.—CARLYLE	76
VI.—“MAN, THE REFORMER”	93
VII.—THE DIAL	112
VIII.—THE DIAL (<i>Continued</i>)	138
IX.—EMERSON ABROAD	155
X.—REPRESENTATIVE MEN	183
XI.—POEMS	205
XII.—THE CLOSING YEARS	221
XIII.—THE FRENCH ESTIMATE	234
APPENDIX	265
INDEX	281



ILLUSTRATIONS.

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i> <i>Frontispiece</i> <i>From the drawing by George T. Tobin.</i>	
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i> <i>From a photograph taken in 1847.</i>	12
<i>The Approach to Emerson's Home</i>	24
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i> <i>After an engraving by Schoff of the original drawing by</i> <i>S. W. Rowse, in the possession of C. E. Norton, Esq.</i> <i>By permission of Houghton, Mifflin, & Co.</i>	36
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i> <i>From the portrait by Scott. In Concord Public Library.</i>	50
<i>Thomas Carlyle</i> <i>From an engraving by G. W. Smith.</i>	76
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson, Samuel Bradford, and</i> <i>William H. Furness</i> <i>From a photograph by Gutekunst, Philadelphia, 1875.</i>	90
<i>Nathaniel Hawthorne</i> <i>From a photograph.</i>	102
<i>Frank B. Sanborn</i> <i>From a photograph by H. G. Smith, Boston</i>	110
<i>Bronson Alcott</i> <i>From a photograph.</i>	122

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Henry D. Thoreau</i>	126
<i>From a steel engraving.</i>	
<i>View of Emerson's Home</i>	140
<i>From a photograph by A. Hosmer.</i>	
<i>Margaret Fuller</i>	144
<i>From a photograph by Lawrence</i>	
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i>	160
<i>From a photograph by H. G. Smith, Boston.</i>	
<i>Emerson's Study at Concord</i>	172
<i>From a photograph by A. Hosmer.</i>	
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i>	192
<i>From the drawing by S. W. Rowse, by permission of Messrs. Curtis & Cameron and Messrs. Small, Maynard, & Co. Copyright, 1901.</i>	
<i>Herman Grimm</i>	234
<i>From a steel engraving.</i>	
<i>Bust of Emerson</i>	250
<i>By Daniel Chester French. By permission of The Century Co.</i>	
<i>Ralph Waldo Emerson</i>	260
<i>From the etching by Aug. Will.</i>	
<i>Emerson's Grave at Concord</i>	272
<i>From a photograph by Alfred Hosmer.</i>	



EMERSON



CHAPTER I.

EARLY YEARS.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in the old parish house of the First Church, on Summer Street, on the twenty-fifth of May, 1803, and died in Concord, seventy-nine years later, on the twenty-seventh of April, 1882. His father, the Rev. William Emerson, was a clergyman of social tastes, with a melodious voice, a scholarly style, and a buoyant disposition. Not from him certainly did Emerson derive his ideal of a sacred individuality to be nurtured in solitude. If we delve the family to the root, we find the grandfather and great-grandfather also clergymen; then by skipping one generation we come again upon the ministerial office, while scattered along collateral lines are many prophets of the soul. For more than two centuries the ministry claimed one or more of the Emersons. "The clergy are as alike as peas," writes the offspring of this clerical race, with a fine independence, "I cannot tell them apart!" One of the great-grandfathers prayed every

night that none of his descendants might ever be rich, and Emerson's worldly condition must sufficiently have pleased the austere ghost of that ancestor, for his poverty in boyhood was not of the bland, comparative nature, but positive and exacting.

He and his four brothers were all under ten years of age when his father died. His mother, a gracious type of woman with sweet, dark eyes and a pleasant voice, was left with a small income and the irrefragable New England ambition toward an education for her sons. This could be gained only by hard labour on the part of the elders, and no little assistance from the boys themselves. At the age of nine Emerson sent to his aunt a chronicle of one day's occupations, and they left but a small amount of time for mere boyish sport. "We retire to bed at different times," the young chronicler concludes, with the majesty of style common to his age; "I go at a little after eight, and retire to my private devotions, and then close my eyes in sleep, and there ends the toils of the day."¹

His aunt writes of their "trials by boarders," and we hear of other trials demanding an endurance somewhat more heroic, a day without food for example, and a sparsity of warm clothing for the bleak New England winters. It would be easy, however, to make too much of these inconveniences; they were no greater than fell to the lot of many a clergyman's family at that unluxurious period, and Emer-

¹ *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson.* By James Elliot Cabot.

son in after-life paid faithful homage to his old nurse Poverty. "Honour to the house where they are simple to the verge of hardship," he wrote, and described the sons of the poor thus eloquently: "What is the hoop that holds them staunch? It is the iron band of poverty, of necessity, of austerity, which, excluding them from the sensual enjoyments which make other boys too early old, has directed their activity in safe and right channels, and made them, despite themselves, reverers of the grand, the beautiful, and the good. Ah! shortsighted students of books, of Nature, and of man! too happy, could they know their advantages. They pine for freedom from that mild parental yoke; they sigh for fine clothes, for rides, for the theatre, and premature freedom and dissipation, which others possess. Woe to them if their wishes were crowned! The angels that dwell with them, and are weaving laurels of life for their youthful brows, are Toil, and Want, and Truth, and Mutual Faith."¹

Elsewhere he says that "a tender boy who wears his rusty cap and outgrown coat, that he may secure the coveted place in college, and the right in the library, is educated to some purpose." He speaks from experience. Whatever was left out from the little household, study was never even pushed aside to make room for immediate material needs, and Emerson was brought up to think no sacrifice extreme that procured the opportunity of learning.

¹ *Society and Solitude.*

He was sent to school before he was three, and it was made a matter for note that he read but poorly at that ripe age. His moral sense also failed prematurely to appear. From writing-school he deliberately and continuously played truant, although at home his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, faithfully indicated to him high standards of conduct. At ten he was in *Virgil*, but, according to his own account, "rather inclined to play than read" when out of school, and looking back to this time his old friend and schoolfellow, Dr. Furness thanked Heaven that he had no talent for anything, "nothing but pure genius, which talents would have overlaid."

At fourteen he was ready for Harvard, and passed a good entrance examination. This argued no unusual precocity, as the college was then more a boy's school than a man's university. Lowell, seventeen years later, entered at fifteen, and Longfellow was not yet so old when he entered Bowdoin, Harvard's ambitious godchild. One of Emerson's aunts is recorded as much regretting the choice of Harvard for her nephew's Alma Mater, her orthodox mind turning in preference to Brown University. But if tradition has any power in itself for good, Harvard was the only place for an Emerson, fifty-six members of the family already having been graduated there. In one way and another he managed to cover most of the heavier expenses of the college course without making serious demands upon the family resources. He was waiter at Commons, which gave him the right to

three-fourths of the cost of his board ; he was the " president's Freshman " (the messenger of the president to summon delinquents, and to announce to the students the decisions of the faculty), and had his lodging free in the president's house. He also was beneficiary of certain scholarship funds. Although he never could recognise that his college experience greatly benefited him, he could praise New England for deciding the destiny of the country in allowing the poor man to " put his hand into the pocket of the rich, and say, You shall educate me, not as you will, but as I will: not alone in the elements, but, by further provision, in the languages, in sciences, in the useful and in elegant arts."¹

As a student, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, he seems not to have been either a great success or a failure. In mathematics he records himself a hopeless dunce. During his Freshman period he boldly announced to his elder brother his scepticism on the subject of " Mathematics and Greek." It was not necessary, he thought, to understand them thoroughly in order to be a good, useful, or even great man. His final standing was a little above the middle of his class in college rank. Many lifelong tendencies and habits reveal themselves in his early attitude toward his studies. Constantly rambling off from such dry terrors as analytical geometry to the pleasant pastures of Chaucer and Montaigne, Plutarch and Plato, he sturdily recommended this system

¹ Essay on *Education*.

in his mature writings. To teachers he dictates: "I believe that our own experience instructs us that the secret of Education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he shall know, what he shall do. It is chosen and foreordained, and he only holds the key to his own secret. By your tampering and thwarting and too much governing he may be hindered from his end and kept out of his own. Respect the child. Wait and see the new product of Nature. Nature loves analogies, but not repetitions. Respect the child. Be not too much his parent. Trespass not on his solitude."¹

Nothing could come nearer to the general principles of modern education than this independent doctrine of which in those days there were few exponents, and as teacher to himself he carried it out to the last article. His intellectual effort was all on the line of his natural inclination. He would "as soon swim the Charles River to get from Cambridge to Boston" as read a book in a difficult foreign tongue when a translation could be had. To the end of his days he kept the browsing habit of his youth, clipping off the sweet perfection of many authors, but seldom searching them profoundly for their inner meaning. In his essay on *Experience* he depicts the restless temper of his mind, so curiously contrasting with his moral steadiness. "Our love of the real draws us to permanence, but health of body consists in circulation, and sanity of mind in variety or facility of associa-

¹ Essay on *Education*.

tion. We need change of objects. Dedication to one thought is quickly odious. We house with the insane and must humour them ; then conversation dies out. Once I took such delight in Montaigne that I thought I should not need any other book ; before that, in Shakespeare ; then in Plutarch ; then in Plotinus ; at one time in Bacon ; afterwards in Goethe ; even in Bettine ; but now I turn the pages of either of them languidly, whilst still I cherish their genius."

Doubtless if in college or later he had applied himself diligently to conquer this desultoriness of interest, his so-called "philosophy" would have gained in order and logical construction, but almost inevitably it would have been limited to a much smaller audience. Emerson's theories and views come hot from his own experience. He generalises himself and states his generalisations in positive terms, without challenging discussion. In this brilliant use of himself as the medium of inspiration lies his great strength. No one ever was less curious concerning what lay outside himself, and with a whimsical, conscious perversity he declined to consider valuable what he himself did not desire. Thus all that he says throbs with personality and touches intimately his own character and temperament. He, whose dearest wish would seem to be aloofness from his fellow-beings, opens to them his heart and soul and seldom speaks to them of aught besides the secrets within his private consciousness. So much does freedom for us.

It is interesting to learn that the president of Harvard during Emerson's life there, Dr. John Thornton Kirkland, composed sermons in the epigrammatic style so familiar to the reader of *Society and Solitude* and *Conduct of Life*, apparently putting them together on the spot from disconnected notes. Whether Emerson caught this manner from him or devised it for himself is a matter of small importance. It is much more significant that in these early college days, before his mind had fairly passed out of its childhood, he initiated his *Commonplace Book*, that scrap-bag of reference from which in the course of his career so many treasurable sentences were to be drawn. Into it went quotations from poetry and prose, original sentiments, phrases for poetical use, and paraphrases of striking passages met with in his reading. When we recall that he was only eighteen when he left college, we realise with what integrity the web of his life-work was spun from a mind singularly undiverted by the guidance of others. This trick of using his reading chiefly to provide texts and illustrations for his independent reflections served him for three-score years, and, characteristically preaching what he practised, he upheld it with confidence as the only way in which a "scholar" profitably could read. "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my

own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. . . . Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings."¹

There were moments, nevertheless, when this shifting interest seemed to him his "cardinal vice of intellectual dissipation," a "sinful strolling from book to book, from care to idleness"; but these were not his moments of conviction. Certainly he gained from his method all that could be gained. His strolling was done among the products of radiant minds. Nor did he always fulfil his tendency. It is reported that he "pored over Montaigne, and knew Shakespeare almost by heart," while for the task of "writing the character of Socrates" he allotted a year. But in the main he tied himself to no author long enough to risk following his leadership. His Aunt Mary, to whose opinions he listened always with reverence and whose letters he copied into his *Commonplace Book* as models of style, encouraged his independence of other minds and outer influences. Much of the counsel upon which he laid most stress came to him straight from her ardent exhortation. The year after he left college, for example, she wrote to him as follows:

"Solitude, which to people not talented to deviate from the beaten track, is the safe ground of mediocrity (without offending), is to learning and genius the only sure labyrinth, though sometimes gloomy,

¹ *The American Scholar.*

to form the eagle-wing that will bear one farther than suns and stars. . . . Would to Providence your unfoldings might be there ! that it were not a wild and fruitless wish that you could be disunited from travelling with the souls of other men ; of living and breathing, reading and writing, with one vital, time-fated idea, their opinions.”¹ Compare with this a passage from the essay on *Culture*, the most eloquent passage to be found therein :

“Solitude, the safeguard of mediocrity, is, to genius, the stern friend, the cold, obscure shelter where moult the wings which will bear it farther than suns and stars. He who should inspire and lead his race must be defended from travelling with the souls of other men, from living, breathing, reading, and writing in the daily time-worn yoke of their opinions.”

It hardly could have been from this good lady, however, that Emerson learned his lesson of manners. Her eccentricity knew no bounds, carrying her to the point of making her shroud, and, wearying of Death's tardy approach, wearing it as a day gown, and riding horseback in it through the streets of Concord. Emerson had no leaning toward these strange forms of individuality. The benignant serenity of his mature life rested on his boyhood and young manhood. Those who knew him in school and college describe him as “a slender, delicate youth . . . of a sensitive, retiring nature,” “equable” and “fair,” not demonstrative or boisterous, but mirthful in his way,

¹ *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson.*

and not perhaps aware of the gracious wisdom and dignity that found their way to his manner, from the intensity of his moral conviction, he was fond of exalting the social gifts of readiness and ease. His lines on *Tact*, so deplorable as an illustration of his poetic method, are a partly satirical expression of his respect for these endowments:

What boots it, thy virtue,
What profit thy parts,
While one thing thou lackest,
The art of all arts!
The only credentials,
Passport to success,
Opens castle and parlour,
Address, man, address.

To what we call pure animal spirits he was entirely a stranger. Even as a boy his habit was to smile where others would laugh, nor could he perceive the happy charm of hearty, spontaneous laughter. "What a seneschal and detective is laughter!" he says, "It seems to require several generations of education to train a squeaking or a shouting habit out of a man. Sometimes when in almost all expressions the Choctaw and the slave have been worked out of him, a coarse nature still betrays itself in his contemptible squeals of joy. It is necessary for the purification of drawing rooms, that these entertaining explosions should be under strict control." His objection to Margaret Fuller, the friend of his middle years, was that she made him laugh too much, and







Dr. Holmes has vividly depicted his mode of exhibiting mirth: "When he laughed it was under protest, as it were, with closed doors, his mouth shut, so that the explosion had to seek another respiratory channel, and found its way out quietly, while his eyebrows, and nostrils and all his features betrayed the 'ground swell,' as Prof. Thayer happily called it, of the half-suppressed convulsion."¹

From the experiences of his youth Emerson was able to deduce a philosophy of training for young people singularly free from impracticability, yet highly imaginative and far-sighted. Books always are needed for purposes of culture, he holds, but books are good "only as far as a boy is ready for them." "He hates the grammar and *Gradus*, and loves guns, fishing-rods, horses, and boats. Well, the boy is right and you are not fit to direct his bringing-up if your theory leaves out his gymnastic training. Archery, cricket, gun and fishing-rod, horse and boat, are all educators, liberalisers; and so are dancing, dress, and street talk; and provided only the boy has resources, and is of a noble and ingenuous strain, these will not serve him less than the books." Minor accomplishments Emerson laid stress upon as enabling the youth to "judge intelligently of much on which otherwise he would give a pedantic squint." All the liberal arts common to the schoolboy age are "lessons in the art of power, which it is his main business to learn." These pleadings for the graces of

¹*Life of Emerson.* By Oliver Wendell Holmes.

training denied to the poor by reason of their cost in money are made with a keen perception of their negative, as well as of their positive values. "Their chief use to the youth is not amusement, but to be known for what they are, and not to remain to him occasions of heart burn. We are full of superstitions. Each class fixes its eyes on the advantages it has not; the refined, on rude strength; the democrat, on birth and breeding. One of the benefits of a college education is to show the boy its little avail. Balls, riding, wine parties and billiards pass to a poor boy for something fine and romantic, which they are not; and a free admission to them on an equal footing, if it were possible, only once or twice, would be worth ten times its cost by undeceiving him."¹ Here, obviously, he is thinking of himself and of his restrictions, bringing into play again his splendid capacity for turning to the account of others his knowledge of his character, temperament, and environment. He placed little value on travel as a means to the highest culture, and he seems to have cared almost as little to explore other minds, except to find therein parallelism with his own.

It was not merely, however, to give voice to his particular ideas that he thus clung to his particular experience. Very early he began to feel the influence of the chief idea developed in his later work; the idea of a universal God, toward whom we tend in all our moments of high thought; whose

¹ *Essay on Culture.*

mind flows into our minds; whose soul flows into our souls, guiding us toward permanence and beauty in our thoughts and actions. In Plato's *Symposium* are certain passages which Emerson must often have read, and which might properly form the text of his collected writings. Diotima is instructing Socrates concerning the mysteries of love, uncertain if he will be able to attain the greater and more hidden ones: "He who would proceed rightly in this matter should begin in youth to turn to beautiful forms; and first, if his instructor guide him rightly, he should learn to love one such form only—out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will himself perceive that the beauty of one form is truly related to the beauty of another; and then if beauty in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognise that the beauty in every form is one and the same! And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms. . . . And the true order of going or being led by another to the things of love, is to use the beauties of earth as steps along which he mounts upwards for the sake of that other beauty, going from one to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair actions, and from fair actions to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. . . . But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty—the

divine beauty I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality, and all the colours and vanities of human life—thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty divine and simple, and bringing into being and educating true creations of virtue, and not idols only? Do you not see that in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities; for he has hold not of an image but of a reality, and bringing forth and educating true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may.”¹

To such a vision of divine beauty Emerson early aspired and early attained. With unerring instinct he sought to reveal it to others by the plain and homely use of his daily experience. His insight is that of a seer, his language that of a poet, his argument that of a plain man acquainted with the plain facts of ordinary life. His power to bring down from Heaven the very soul of moral beauty, and show it in the protean forms of commonplace, gives him his especial influence over the young, who like to exalt their motives, and find “sweeping a room to the glory of God” easier than sweeping it without a thought beyond its cleanliness. It is customary to think of Emerson as a “philosopher” and a “sage,” but it is pleasanter and possibly truer to think of him as forever a meditative youth to whom life suddenly unfolded its beneficent meaning, making it impos-

¹ Jowett's translation.

sible for him to grow old or dispirited. The teachings of his boyhood are marvellously like the teachings of his age, and the freshness of his response to precious intuitions of eternal truth is kept to the end of his career. In the first chapter of his life we see him fix his eyes upon spiritual happiness, in the last chapter we find his gaze no less divinely innocent, no less joyously serene.

“The sun,” he says in the earliest of his published writings—“the sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child.”¹ Such childhood he never outgrew.

¹ Essay on *Nature*.





CHAPTER II.

PREPARATION.

WHEN Emerson left college in 1821, he expected ultimately to follow the tradition of the family and become a minister of religion. Without having applied himself with special interest to theological problems, he had been preparing himself in his own way for his prospective work, and it was significant that a concern for the art of expression was prominent in his mind from the beginning. Many of the quotations and original reflections in his Commonplace Books had been collected there with reference to their use in future sermons; he was proud of his poet's fancies, and "hoped to put on eloquence as a robe," burning, he said, "after the *aliquid immensum infinitusque* which Cicero desired." In his boyish dreams he saw himself holding his congregations by the power of oratory, taking sovereign possession of their emotions, and the vision was alluring, yet he was not diverted by it from his allegiance to pure sincerity.

"Even a seraph's eloquence," he avowed, "will

shamefully defeat its own end if it has not first won the heart of the defender to the cause he defends," and the future was to show the candour of this protestation. Thus, early in the morning hours, he found himself, without the delay of erratic wandering in alien fields by which the haggards of literature squander their energies. Although the pulpit was not long to hold him, no whit of his training for it was lost, and his warning note against the waste of time is prompted by his adequate economy of that precious possession. "Profligacy," he says in his essay on *Wealth*, "consists not in spending years of time or chests of money, but in spending them off the line of your career. The crime which bankrupts men and states is job-work ; declining from your main design, to serve a turn here or there. Nothing is beneath you if it is in the direction of your life ; nothing is great or desirable if it is off from that."

Naturally, the line of his career revealed itself to him as the line of ethical instruction, and naturally, also, he practised almost in childhood the interrogation of his soul under the unflinching censorship of his doughty Aunt Mary, from whose devoted vigilance no child of the Emerson flock could hope to escape. It was with her that he corresponded concerning his psychological state. Nothing could speak better for the poise and clear sanity of his nature than that he escaped unscathed from this stimulating but dangerous influence exercised with so much

force and persuasive eloquence during his impressionable years. He did escape, and moreover, he probed the mysticism of that curious exalted mind until he reached the flaming conviction inspiring all his own writings, the conviction of the direct dealing of God with the individual soul. He became the apostle whose beautiful utterance of the message made it his own, but it is pleasant to recognise the overwhelming contribution to his creed by the poor lady, who seemed, she said, "to live to give pain rather than pleasure."

The pursuit of style, however, although his aunt had her share in furthering it, was Emerson's personal affair. No one could materially have helped him hammer out from the common vocabulary of our speech such expressive forms, such stately symbols, passages of such sincere distinction. During his college years he had moved among the greater writers and in a certain sense he took them all for his models but not one of them for his master. It was a time of eloquence in Boston. Channing was preaching "sublime sermons" in Federal Street, Edward Everett had just returned from his five years in Europe, and was drawing all the young enthusiasm of his native town under his glittering spell. But Emerson's star differed from these in glory. Prophet of inspiration though he was, he spared no pains to provide for the "inner light" a medium as artistically interpretative as the artist within him could create. His method was the slow and searching ef-

fort of serious artists toward large and truthful rendering of a personal vision.

Once he wrote to his aunt who had asked him to procure for her a copy of Baillie's poems : " What do you want them for ? Only as I do in my slovenly way of thinking, for a kind of better word-hunting, that a phrase which catches the eye may be tortured in the mind till it chances to suggest a new thought or an old one with a new face ? " From these tortured phrases he evolved epithets of untainted and clean-cut felicity, compact, and vigorous bodies for his poetic and dignified ideas. His " slovenly thinking," certainly not marked by the arduous ratiocination of his theological comrades, was redeemed by the far from slovenly workmanship spent upon the form enshrining it.

Professor Woodbury describes his manuscripts as filled with evidences of his reconsideration and re-touching, the language subjected to multitudinous revisions until the paper resembled palimpsest, the sentences modified, abated, and restricted to narrower outline until tempered to the exact fact, the " clean and clear distinction."

" Do not put hinges to your work to make it cohere " is one of his directions to young writers, and the lack of " hinges " in his work has brought down upon him the adverse criticism of high authorities. Mr. Morley has expressed irritation with the " fervent votaries " who have praised his style ; Matthew Arnold declares that it " has not the requisite

wholeness of good tissue." Even Mr. Henry James, of whom we expect the utmost sensitiveness to the least obvious forms of art, utters the astonishing impression that Emerson's writings "were not composed at all," and deems it a sign of his power that he is "a striking exception to the general rule that writings live in the last resort by their form." Mr. Birrell refers to his "unparalleled nonsequaciousness." Carlyle, reading the Essays in sheets before their publication in England, found the style not entirely coherent, "the paragraph not as a beaten ingot, but as a beautiful square bag of duck shot held together by canvas." Emerson himself doubted if he were capable of artistic construction, and wrote to Carlyle about one of his early volumes: "In a fortnight or three weeks my little raft will be afloat. Expect nothing more of my powers of construction, no shipbuilding, no clipper, smack, nor skiff even, only boards and logs tied together."

All this, apparently, because with the exhausting labour of those who regard their workmanship as the means to great ends, he has concealed the skeleton of his construction, and has concentrated upon his central idea countless statements of truth related to it by delicate unseen connections, too exquisitely realised to be distorted into prominence. His essays are all pictures of the soul under different lights and in different positions toward life. The sentences are brief and perhaps fragmentary, as the crisp, broken brushwork of certain painters may be called so. But

unity in literary style is no more really dependent upon the length of the sentence than unity in a picture is dependent upon the touch of the brush against the canvas. In one case as in the other the final co-ordinated effect is gained by a design that may be frankly before the eye as an arrangement of abstract lines and spaces, or may be suggested by an invisible harmony of the elements of the work. Certain pictures seem to the decorative designer, accustomed to observe external patterns and outlines, quite without the architectonic quality when that very quality is supremely indicated by the relation of the values and colours and planes. It would be the mistake of shallow criticism to deny to Emerson the power to create a general impression, coherent and whole, with the heterogeneous material of his note-books. The idea in his mind was uniformly single and the contributed ideas from the works of others invariably converged to it in a perfect relation. His essay on *Nature*, first printed in 1836, but containing much fruit of the reflection indulged in during the pensive idle hours at Cambridge fifteen years earlier, furnishes a notable example of this organic unity. Its central idea, in fact, is nothing less than the unity of all nature, physical and spiritual. In the first chapter of the series forming the essay, this herald note of æsthetic comprehension is sounded :

“When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by

manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet."

The different parts of the essay show the ministry of Nature to the senses, the nobler service rendered to the sense of beauty, the expression of the spirit through natural forms, the relation of human actions to the universal spirit (with emphasis again laid upon "the unity in variety which meets us everywhere,") and, finally, the moral significance of this supreme law of art, everywhere observed. "It is not so pertinent to man to know all the individuals of the animal kingdom, as it is to know whence and whereto is this tyrannising unity in his constitution, which evermore separates and classifies things, endeavouring to reduce the most diverse to one form. When I behold a rich landscape, it is less to my purpose to recite correctly the order and superposition of the strata, than to know why all thought of multitude is lost in a tranquil sense of unity. . . . The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or blank that we see when we look at nature is in our eye. . . . The reason why the world lacks unity





and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is dis-united with himself."

No observer with such an extraordinary perception of synthesis in the external world, and in the region of spiritual suggestion, could fail to attempt synthesis in giving expression to his thought; nor could the attempt be completely a failure. With Emerson it came much nearer to being completely a success. Logically his arguments are non-existent. He does not argue at all in the strict sense of the word. But his art is rich and explicit, strong, and balanced, not deeply coloured, but with atmospheric depths and with a curious vibrating note of joy quite independent of his hopeful temperament—the joy of the artist skilfully moulding his material—the unmistakable exultation of those who are consciously producing forms of beauty.

There were to be, however, some years of plain drudgery before the happy thinker could apply himself to the fulfilment of his natural destiny. While he was in college and before he was sixteen he had done at least enough school-teaching to earn a new coat for himself, and as soon as he was graduated he went to work in earnest as the assistant of his brother William who kept a school for young women in his mother's house. William was twenty, Waldo, eighteen, and the school was popular. Within three years Emerson had earned between two and three thousand dollars, at that time no mean reward for such labour, and quite sufficient to rouse the alarm

of his Spartan aunt who feared the effect upon him of such ease of circumstance. He himself was not impressed by the amenity of his situation. He described himself as "lifting the truncheon against the fair-haired daughters" of the "raw city" and as "toiling through the miserable employment without even the poor satisfaction of doing it well." "The good suspect me and the geese dislike me," he added, with a self-consciousness not usual in either his public or private intercourse; and, still in this gloomy strain, he wrote his famous poem: "Good-by, proud world, I'm going home." Emphatically the school-room was too contracted for his chosen horizon, yet he seems to have been a satisfactory teacher along orthodox lines, winning the respect of his pupils and the approbation of their parents. We have only his own authority that, judged by his higher standards, he was something of a failure. He lacked as yet the independence of judgment that later forced him out of ruts worn by convention, and long afterward he blamed himself for not introducing the young minds with which he came into contact to contemplation of the eternal laws that called to him through the dull rattle of common occupations. In his room at night he was writing down his thoughts on morals, but he kept them safely out of the school-room and shyly grappled there with the genii of languages, geography, arithmetic, and chemistry, each wearing for him a fearful mien. It would be sad indeed for those fond of the pungent flavour of immaturity to

miss the picture he draws of himself, terrified and embarrassed and stirred by youth's agitations among the "fair haired daughters" who tormented him.

Early in 1825 he gave over keeping school and entered the Divinity School at Cambridge but left it in a month's time in ill-health and with an affection of the eyes that forbade his reading. He presently resumed school-teaching for another year. He attended the lectures of the class he had expected to join in the Divinity School, however, and, with surely as little technical preparation as the most liberal Christian could wish, he was "approved to preach" by the Middlesex Association of Ministers, October 10, 1826.

Even yet his brief occupation of the pulpit was at some distance away. His first public sermon was delivered on the Sunday following his approbation, but his health immediately demanded close attention, and before the end of the year the weakness of his lungs drove him to a softer climate than that of New England. He spent the winter at St. Augustine, Florida, and systematically refrained from any exertion that could diminish his chance of recovery.

In April he recorded that he had not written a sermon since leaving home, and the following winter, still far from sound, he wrote to his brother William that he was "living cautiously, yea, treading on eggs," to strengthen his constitution. He never wrote when he could walk, nor when he could laugh, he said, but made it his business to build up a fair

structure of physical strength and efficiency for his healthy mind to work within. It is interesting to contrast his temper in this regard with that of the youthful Channing, whose rule of life during his season of boyish extravagance compelled him to sleep on the bare floor, endure cold, eat what he disliked, and sit at his books until the daylight broke upon his studies. By these means he thought to curb the flesh, and succeeded in almost ridding himself of its burden.

Emerson's temperament in contrast to Channing's was lacking in nervous energy, and doubtless it would have required a stronger exertion of will to overcome the languor of invalidism, had he thought that the way of wisdom, than to yield to its beneficent influences. Nevertheless, if duty had whispered the message of activity his reply would have been that of the youth in his well-known quatrain, and nothing is more characteristic of his entire sanity than his attitude toward ill-health. Whatever his physical condition his reason was uniformly robust, and the philosophy he evolved from the experiences of illness is marked by the balance and sobriety of his natural judgment.

Health, as the basis of excellence and beauty of appearance and performance, finds frequent mention in his works : "The first wealth is health," he urges in his essay on *Power*, "Sickness is poor-spirited, and cannot serve anyone : it must husband its resources to live. But health or fulness answers its own ends

and has to spare ; runs over and inundates the neighbourhoods and creeks of other men's necessities." He speaks with approbation of the Greek delight in the perfection of the body, declares that all healthy things are sweet-tempered, that extraordinary health is needed for performance of great mark, and that "no labour, pains, temperance, poverty, nor exercise that can gain it must be grudged." And against the whimpering habit of invalidism, possibly more popular fifty years ago than now, he raises his voice in lusty expostulation :

"There is one topic peremptorily forbidden to all well-bred, to all rational mortals, namely, their distempers. If you have not slept, or if you have slept, or if you have headache, or sciatica, or leprosy, or thunder-stroke, I beseech you, by all angels, to hold your peace, and not pollute the morning, to which all housemates bring serene and pleasant thoughts, by corruption and groans."

These were precepts that had their origin in his struggle with a constitutional delicacy, ominous enough in one of his family. His younger brother Edward with a similar tendency to disease, worked himself into an early grave ; and his brother Charles died at twenty-seven. Before Edward died his mind gave way, and Emerson curiously expressed his belief that no such evil was in store for him, declaring that he had so much mixture of silliness in his intellectual frame as to temper him against it. Whether its name was silliness or sense, there certainly was mingled

with his other mental qualities a saving element that kept him free from extravagance and irregularity, and, prompted by this, he won back his health by slow degrees, grudging the idle hours and gaining little pleasure from the sight of strange places, loving not "the look of foreign men," but patiently abiding the time for action, and losing nothing we may well assume for the gradual ripening of his thoughts before he committed them to publicity.

He had the faculty of detaching himself from his life, from his mirth and from his melancholy—at this time the two were mingled in his temperament—from his suffering, his disappointments, and even from his convictions. He held them away from him and pondered them, with the result of finally offering them in a generalised form wonderfully adapted to the needs of individualities with which his own had little in common; with the result, too, of losing the sharp tang of reality associated with personal experience. Indomitably as he clung to facts and to the symbols of common life, he could not make them savour of their mother earth after he had appropriated them. The very incidents of the dooryard and the threshold became remote under his spiritualising touch. "Thought makes everything fit for use," he says in his lecture on the poet. ". . . Small and mean things serve as well as great symbols. . . . The poorest experience is rich enough for all the purposes of expressing thought." And thus it was with him: He scorned nothing because of its home-

liness, but the homeliest word in the language lost its power to stir the pulse with its reality when it became the vehicle of his disinterested thought. "Let us treat the men and women well, treat them as if they were real," he says; "perhaps they are." And stoutly as we may believe that they are, he draws us within the circle of his doubt.

He early experienced and seems never to have lost the feeling that comes perhaps to all persons once,—the feeling that we are merely dissolving types of universal life, and can call nothing our own. Intimately as he searched himself and probed his personal experience, it was invariably desire for knowledge of the type, never the egoism of the individual, that impelled him. No petty self-concern compromised his consecration to universal interests. It is a curious paradox that he alienates himself from us in his very refusal to conceive himself as separate from us. Seeking our features in his soul and revealing himself as the likeness of the human world, he yet fails to come very close to us, because he ignores in us the qualities not also present in his own nature, and in himself he ignores whatever he cannot mould to a universal application. Readers impressed by his emphasis upon habits of self-reliance, independence, the protection of the individuality by solitude, the impossibility of adequate communication between any two human minds, the divine right of self-development, find puzzling his freedom from peculiarity, his wide and general use of the essential spiritual

truth of humanity ; but the two apparently opposed attitudes toward life are not difficult to harmonise in a thinker so rich in moral imagination. He has many times made perfectly clear the steps toward harmony, from the differentiated souls of man to the enveloping soul to which he seldom gives the name of God. The realm of which he writes in *The Dæmonic and the Celestial Love* is the one to which he constantly directs his thought :

Thou must mount for love
 Into vision where all form
 In one only form dissolves ;

 Where unlike things are like ;
 Where good and ill,
 And joy and moan,
 Melt into one.
 There Past, Present, Future, shoot
 Triple blossoms from one root ;
 Substances at base divided
 In their summits are united ;
 There the holy essence rolls,
 One through separated souls.

He stood, composed and ready, at the outset of his long career, the same in all essential regards as at the end. The antithesis of the mythical Undine, he seemed a spirit continually seeking a material envelope of human associations to make visible his connection with his fellow beings. That its form should be beautiful he insisted as an artist ; that it should

illustrate truth was indispensable to him as both artist and moralist; that it should wear to us the familiar face of life, as our kindly neighbour he intended ; but what he showed us was instead the inscrutable countenance of that inner life of which we stand somewhat in awe at our bravest ; to which, despite its identity with ourselves, we bear almost the relation of strangers.





CHAPTER III.

RELIGION.

ON the eleventh of March, 1829, Emerson, then in his twenty-sixth year, was ordained as the colleague of the Reverend Henry Ware of the Second Church of Boston. He had already substituted for Mr. Ware during the illness of the latter, and a parish familiar with his preaching accorded him seventy-four out of seventy-nine votes. A few weeks later he became the sole incumbent, and in September he was married to Ellen Tucker, a charming frail New England girl to whom for nine months he had been engaged.

Thus he was launched upon his profession under the most smiling auspices, and with the promise of a brilliant future. For three years he preached in the "venerable house" his fathers "built to God," and apparently without arousing any doubt of his conformity with the Unitarian thought of his congregation, although orthodox minds were shocked by his "untheological style." Mr. Cabot, having read the one hundred and seventy-one sermons still lying by

Emerson's request in manuscript, can report nothing unconventional or revolutionary to be found upon their now ancient pages, but he reminds us that we have travelled far on the liberal road since the time of their writing, and are not perhaps so keen as Emerson's contemporaries to catch the note of change.

It may be significant that from the few who have set down their impressions of the young preacher during these first years, we learn more of his graciousness of presence, his benignity of countenance, the sweetness of his voice and the beauty of his elocution, than of his special teachings. No doubt what Lowell said much later was then as true ; that many went not so much to hear what Emerson said as to hear Emerson. One of his hearers has recorded, however, "an infinite charm of simplicity and wisdom" in an early sermon, "with occasional illustrations from nature." "These," he adds "were about the most delicate and dainty things of the kind which I had ever heard ; I could understand them, if not the fresh philosophical novelties of the discourse. Another describes him as coming to the pulpit of a church with whose minister he was exchanging and preaching a sermon "with his chin in the air in scorn of the whole human race." It is difficult now to find in any of his writings scorn of humanity, but to an unsympathetic mind his stout ethical independence of low or utilitarian ends may easily have worn this face. Unconsciously to himself he was nearing the breaking of his bonds to the

ministry, an act that, when at last he came to it, was performed with such grace and kindness as to seem more like benediction than defiance.

The religious life of New England for many years had been flowing from old forms into new ones, and was now curiously mingling the rigid traditions of Calvinism with the influences of German and classic philosophy and scientific investigation. Gradually the pale keen Puritan atmosphere of the New England Church had softened to a type of Congregationalism in which the mind could expand toward individual inquiry, and during the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century the Unitarians carried still farther the personal testing of religious belief.

In 1830, the year after Emerson's ordination, the separation of the Unitarian from the Calvinistic churches was practically complete, and Dr. Channing, representing the more spiritual side of the sect, dwelt fervently upon the right of the rational nature to guide belief, but found no difficulty in accepting, under the guidance of his reason, the supernatural character of Christ and the Bible. This, essentially, was the Unitarianism under the shelter of which Emerson stood, and was wholly different from the "Sensational" philosophy, as it was called, of the more materialistic thinkers who followed Locke and Bentham, denied the existence of innate ideas, based morality upon utility, and recognised "nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses." Pure idealism (later to be called Transcend-



entalism from Kant's use of the term "transcendental" to denominate intuitive ideas transcending experience), had not yet gained the doctrinal solidity and formality of a school, but was diffused through the higher regions of New England thought.

Intimations of Transcendental philosophies had reached Emerson from various European sources, and in 1827 Carlyle's articles upon German literature had appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, written at the glowing period of their author's life when he could speak hopefully of an era of "new Spirituality and Belief; in the midst of old Doubt and Denial, as it were, a new revelation of Nature, and the Freedom and Infinitude of Man, wherein Reverence is again rendered compatible with Knowledge, and Art and Religion are one." Coleridge also brought his readers on both sides of the Atlantic in contact with German thought, and people interested in the things of the mind were generally astir with the quickening of ideas that were certainly not new but that were then unfamiliar. How far Emerson was influenced by these teachings can hardly be estimated; not more, perhaps, than by the Greek writers with whom he had become acquainted in college; but he read them all according to his custom, for the "tustres," and let the suggestions that came from them melt gently into the simple belief which he finally succeeded in detaching from the abstruse speculation and argument so repugnant to his direct mental vision. As "an eternal man," to use one of

his own vivid characterisations, he could not anywhere find a philosophy flexible enough to fit without constraint his intuitive wisdom. It accorded completely with his temperament to accept the conception of a Universal Mind or Soul of which all nature is the expression, and of a faculty by which divinity may be recognised and known. Such an interpretation of Nature and God had an indescribable fascination for a mind constantly craving beauty of thought as an element of spiritual life, and he passionately made his own this doctrine of the ages by consistently disconnecting it from all fixed symbols and from narrow or limiting systems and dogmas. So far he was independent of local influences and after what he characterises as "the war between institutions and nature" had begun in the society surrounding him he stood among the contending forces, seeking a leader. "I need instructors," he exclaimed, with a certain pathos in the innocent humility of the cry, "God's greatest gift is a teacher; and when will He send me one full of truth and of boundless benevolence and heroic sentiments?" He was suffering the singularity of all who in aim and insight are raised above their companions. His destiny as a master precluded for him the comfort of adherence to any school or teacher.

No teaching of the ancients received more promptly his joyous approval than the doctrine of the Flowing. "Here is the difference," he said, "betwixt the poet and the mystic, that the last nails

a symbol to one sense which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false." In his position as a Christian minister he could not lay aside his poetic character, and by the latter he was led to question the benefit gained from traditional forms of worship.

In 1832 he astonished the members of his congregation by proposing to them the discontinuance of an institution so closely interwoven with their reverent devotion as to seem inseparable from it; the rite of the Lord's Supper which he found himself unable to regard as a suitable commemoration of the spirit of Christ. He proposed that the use of the bread and wine be dispensed with, and the service made one of the spirit only, informal and voluntary. His hold upon his people was so strong that the suggestion was debated though not accepted, and he went up into the White Hills where he argued with his own soul concerning the course he should pursue. That he approached the subject in a mood far removed from critical superiority is obvious not merely from our knowledge of his temper, but from the tone of his journal during the interval of uncertainty while church and priest were pondering their respective attitudes. "It seems not worth while for them who charge others with exalting forms above the moon to fear forms themselves with extravagant dislike," he admitted, but the conclusion was foregone, and he returned to resign his office.

In the sermon announcing his resignation he

deals cogently and winningly with the cause of his separation from the church, and in a manner that frequently recalls his own counsel to those engaged in religious argument, not to "put yourself in a false position with your contemporaries by indulging a vein of hostility and bitterness," but "though your views are in straight antagonism to theirs" to assume "that you are saying precisely that which all think, and in the flow of wit and love roll out your paradoxes in solid column, with not the infirmity of a doubt."

For the one supreme occasion he carefully supports his instinctive conviction with arguments less vital and important to him than to his hearers. He examines the authority on which the ordinance of the Communion rests, showing himself capable of orderly dialectics with full attention to subordinate and specific illustrations of his central idea. But the central idea finally is emphasised in a passage of extraordinary sincerity which even in this day of liberal interpretations, rings in the mind as one of the clearest and most courageous appeals to inherent morality possible to be made from any pulpit.

"If I understand the distinction of Christianity," he says, "the reason why it is to be preferred over all other systems and is divine is this, that it is a moral system; that it presents men with truths which are their own reason, and enjoins practices that are their own justification; that if miracles may be said to have been its evidence to the first Chris-

tians, they are not its evidence to us, but the doctrines themselves; that every practice is Christian which praises itself, and every practice unchristian which condemns itself. I am not engaged to Christianity by decent forms, or saving ordinances; it is not usage, it is not what I do not understand, that binds me to it,—let these be the sandy foundations of falsehoods. What I revere and obey in it is its reality, its boundless charity, its deep interior life, the rest it gives to mind, the echo it returns to my thoughts, the perfect accord it makes with my reason through all its representation of God and His Providence; and the persuasion and courage that come out thence to lead me upward and onward. Freedom is the essence of this faith. It has for its object simply to make men good and wise. Its institutions then should be as flexible as the wants of men. That form out of which the life and suitableness have departed, should be as worthless in its eyes as the dead leaves that are falling around us.

“And therefore, although for the satisfaction of others I have labored to show by the history that this rite was not intended to be perpetual; although I have gone back to weigh the expressions of Paul, I feel that here is the true point of view. In the midst of considerations as to what Paul thought, and why he so thought, I cannot help feeling that it is time misspent to argue to or from his convictions, or those of Luke and John, respecting any form. I seem to lose the substance in seeking the shadow.

“That for which Paul lived and died so gloriously; that for which Jesus gave Himself to be crucified; the end that animated the thousand martyrs and heroes who have followed His steps, was to redeem us from a formal religion, and teach us to seek our well-being in the formation of the soul. The whole world was full of idols and ordinances. The Jewish was a religion of forms; it was all body, it had no life, and the Almighty God was pleased to qualify and send forth a man to teach men that they must serve Him with the heart; that only that life was religious which was thoroughly good; that sacrifice was smoke, and forms were shadows. This man lived and died true to this purpose; and now, with His blessed word and life before us, Christians must contend that it is a matter of vital importance,—really a duty, to commemorate him by a certain form, whether that form be agreeable to their understandings or not! Is not this to make vain the gift of God? Is not this to turn back the hand on the dial? Is not this to make men—to make ourselves,—forget that not forms, but duties; not names, but righteousness and love are enjoined; and that in the eye of God there is no other measure of the value of any one form than the measure of its use?”

This limpid statement, suffused with feeling, but without heat or bitterness or superfluity of expression, indicates a plane of discussion below which Emerson never sank, although he was many times to rise above it. It is related of him that on the

evening when his church was considering his proposition, he sat talking with undisturbed serenity with a fellow-clergyman on literature and other topics alien to his personal concern, until, as he rose to leave, he said gently: "This is probably the last time we shall meet as brethren in the same calling." It was characteristic of him to let nothing so individual and fragmentary as his private loss or gain interrupt the harmony of his mind; and though he may have been saddened by his inability to carry his congregation with him to the spiritual altitude where he was most at home, there is no one in history of whom it is more possible to believe that his sorrow under such circumstances was altruistic and devoid of self-pity or wounded pride.

Although his farewell sermon illustrates both his candour and his kindness, it suggests in its careful phrasing the place in which he stood. He was later to warn young preachers: "When there is any difference felt between the foot-board of the pulpit and the floor of the parlor, you have not yet said that which you should say." The foot-board of the pulpit gave in this instance a slight rigidity to the form in which the sapient thought found its expression, and the effect is not without its value. In his endeavour to make very plain to a deeply interested public the beliefs that were to separate his path from theirs, he abstained from the strongly individual idiom by which his later utterances are marked and sometimes marred. In his famous Divinity School Address,

delivered six years later before the senior class in Divinity College, Cambridge, the style has notably changed. It is more richly coloured and various, and the ideas are clothed in words of memorable beauty. There is even a touch of rhetorical fluency in such passages as this in which the religious sentiment is exalted:

“Wonderful is its power to charm and to command. It is a mountain air. It is the embalmer of the world. It is myrrh and storax, and chlorine and rosemary. It makes the sky and the hills sublime, and the silent song of the stars is it.” The occasional perversity of metaphor in the effort toward poignant statement of feeling gave to the mocking youth of the period its opportunity. The first biographer of Theodore Parker describes the promising young graduates as repairing in numbers to the apothecary shops to discover what else beside “myrrh and rosemary” Religion was, and adverse critics were used to toss and trample these phrases with zeal, “thinking they had the man in them and were punishing him well.” The deep poetry of the author’s mind could not be obscured, however, by the straggling clouds of fantasy now and then trailing across the utterance of his inspiration. The opening sentences are addressed to the æsthetic mood, and present an exquisite picture of lovely nature charged with the joy of the unwearied and unsophisticated beholder:

“In this refulgent summer, it has been a luxury

to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm of Gilead, and the new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays. Man under them seems a young child, and his huge globe a toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river, and prepares his eyes again for the crimson dawn. The mystery of nature was never displayed more happily. The corn and the wine have been freely dealt to all creatures, and the never-broken silence with which the old bounty goes forward has not yielded yet one word of explanation." From this richly sensuous strain he passes to the felicitous expression of the beauty of holiness, not for an instant forgetting the subjection of the mind to the principles that rule alike in art and morals, not for an instant magnifying the particular above the general. The sentiment of virtue, he declares, is a reverence and delight in the presence of certain divine laws before which the great world shrinks at once into a mere illustration and fable of the mind. "Thought may work cold and intransitive in things and find no end or unity; but the dawn of the sentiment of virtue on the heart gives and is the assurance that Law is sovereign over all natures; and the worlds, time, space, eternity, do seem to break out into joy." The first

suggestion of positive departure from the doctrines of the Christian Church came in a sentence so filled with the magic of feeling that the delicate removal of one of the pillars of orthodoxy could hardly be realised. "This sentiment (of virtue)," the serene voice continued, "is divine and deifying. It is the beatitude of man. It makes him illimitable. Through it the soul first knows itself. It corrects the capital mistake of the infant man, who seeks to be great by following the great, and hopes to derive advantages from another, by showing the fountain of all good to be in himself, and that he, equally with every man, is an inlet into the deeps of Reason. When he says 'I ought' when love warms him; when he chooses, warmed from on high, the good and great deed; then, deep melodies wander through his soul from Supreme Wisdom."

Teaching much more dynamic was to follow, and was heard with dismay by many who had gathered to attend the address. Emerson cut clearly through the fogs of semi-Liberalism with a crystalline eloquence. Of Christ he declared that He belonged to the true race of prophets, that He saw the mystery of the soul, and, "drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, He lived in it, and had His being there"; that "alone in all history He estimated the greatness of man," that He saw "that God incarnates Himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of His World." But this was not the Christ taught by the Church. "The idioms of

His language and the figures of His rhetoric have usurped the place of His truth; and churches are not built on His principles, but on His tropes." The first defect of Christianity was pointed out to be its exaggeration of the personal, the positive, and the ritual, its dwelling "with noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus." "The soul knows no persons," was the oracular sentence which has formed the text for so many a Liberal sermon since that fiery July day. Nor did the doctrine of miracles performed by Christ escape the shining blade of this independent mind. Christ spoke of miracles, "for He felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth; and He knew that this daily miracle shines as the character ascends. But the word Miracle, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain."

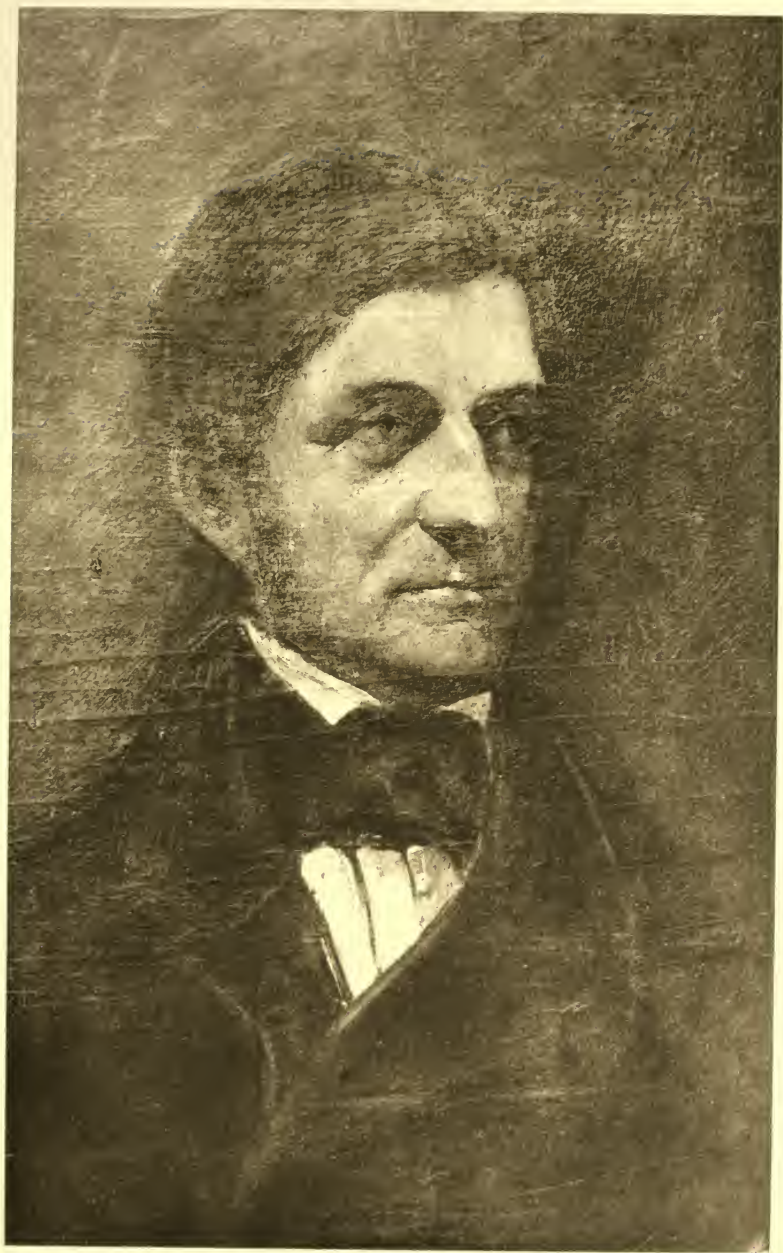
With a desire, not now misunderstood by the truly religious thinker, to identify the Holy Spirit in man with the spirit of Christ and with the immanent mind of God, Emerson prayed the young students of Divinity not to degrade the life and dialogues of Christ by insulating them and making them peculiar, but instead to let them "lie as they be, alive and warm, part of human life and of the landscape and of the cheerful day." He besought his hearers to search the living revelation of God in the Moral Nature, and to look within themselves for intuitive knowledge of the divine laws, to "go alone; to

refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil."

In this address practically all that was essential in Emerson's belief was stated without explanation and without arrogance but with a perfectly definite moral purpose. Whatever he preached thereafter in the domain of ethics was merely a different expression of the convictions embodied with more than his usual care for obvious construction and composition in his appeal to the young men who were about to teach in the name of religion. A few were stirred by the imaginative verity of his outlook and by the poetry of his message. Theodore Parker, for one, went home and recorded in his journal: "My soul is roused and this week I shall write the long-meditated sermons on the state of the Church and the duties of these times." This fairly represents the nature of Emerson's influence even to this day. As he would have wished, his mission has been to rouse the souls of others to the expression of their own thoughts. The fact that he did not often pin himself to anything like a doctrinal declaration, that he never failed to leave in his work an avenue of escape for the imagination into the region of eternal mystery, has given him his peculiar hold upon spiritual minds of all classes of belief. The difference between him and the other "mystics" and reformers of his time might fairly be compared to the difference between any great painter and the Preraphaelites. The latter rep-

resented fragments of truth as if they comprised the whole ; the master, on the contrary, continually suggests the curving of the spherul universe and the presence of hidden corollaries and even antipodal truths harmonised in exquisite generalisation. Metaphysicians and psychologists found Emerson an impossible man with whom to argue, since he calmly stated that he could not possibly give one argument on which any of his doctrines stood. "I do not know what arguments mean in reference to any expression of a thought," he said, and it is conceivable that his position of mediator between truth and man, the position of Christ Himself to orthodox believers, but tenable, according to Emerson's creed, by any listener at the gates of conscience, seemed to many reverent souls presumption. It gave him, however, that access to the simple mind by which moral leaders are distinguished from theologians. One of his congregation said with sincerity : "We are very simple people ; we cannot understand anyone but Mr. Emerson," and despite his occasional lapses into a vaguely metaphysical dialect disturbing to our realisation of his greatness, the larger part of his writing on religion is limpid with pure conviction. He told his hearers that if the moral sentiment is in the heart, God is there ; that when the half gods of tradition and rhetoric depart, the way is made clear for belief in the one true and immanent Deity ; that the laws of God are the same wherever manifested in Nature or in the human heart, that all the religions of the world

have their origin in one religious sentiment, and that there is a force always at work to make the best better and the worst good. He told them to learn to walk alone with God and to receive from Him the vital principle of rectitude ; to lay aside dogma and liturgy as cumbersome garments hindering the free movement of the spirit ; to be incurious of immortality and to ask no questions of the Supreme Power, to work with high aims and to love work, to fill their hearts with kindness and throw themselves joyfully into the sublime order. The words oftenest upon his lips were "joy," "beauty," "love." Matthew Arnold found his temper of serene optimism the chief element in his wisdom, and hardly to be overrated. John Morley, on the other hand, is inclined to resent somewhat the indifference with which he regarded "the world's bitter puzzles." His reluctance to dwell upon Sin and Death seems to this sound critic to indicate a certain wilfulness in his point of view. "He had no eye, like Dante's, for the vileness, the cruelty, the utter despicableness to which humanity may be moulded. If he saw them at all, it was through the softening and illusive medium of generalised phrases. Nor was he ever shocked and driven into himself by 'the immoral thoughtlessness' of men. The courses of Nature, and the prodigious injustices of man in society, affect him with neither horror nor awe. For the fatal Nemesis or terrible Erinnyes, daughters of Erebus and Night, Emerson substitutes a fair-weather abstraction named Compens-





sation." Perhaps Arnold's attitude is the fairer of the two.

Emerson's religion was constructive to the highest degree, and those who judge it fragmentarily miss its beneficent purpose. In his essay on the "fair-weather abstraction named Compensation" he does not so much ignore evil as recognise in it the tragedy of lost opportunity for good. "Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts, and times within itself. Nature, truth, virtue, are the influx from thence. Vice is the absence or departure of the same. Nothing, Falsehood, may indeed stand as the great Night or shade on which as a background the living universe paints itself forth, but no fact is begotten by it; it cannot work, for it is not. It cannot work any good; it cannot work any harm. It is harm inasmuch as it is worse not to be than to be." This is not very different from the Biblical teaching that whoso findeth Christ findeth life and that he who sinneth against Christ wrongeth his own soul, that all who hate Christ love death.

The virtue of Emerson's "gospel" as it is called by those who decline to call it philosophy, lies in its extraordinary breadth. "He had not a broad intellect," said Carlyle, "but it was clear and sometimes

even profound." Yet breadth is certainly the distinction of a religious belief with which neither science nor art can quarrel, to which the religions of the past have contributed and which has combined so fruitfully with the religion of the later day. Much has been claimed for Emerson's teaching that is not found in it by the candid inquirer, but the strongest element of its ethical influence has not been too widely dwelt upon. It consists in his recognition of ethical law as related to or identical with the fundamental law in all other departments of human activity. The "unity of nature" has been a phrase of vague suggestion with many writers and a theme of irresistible fascination with a few, but no one has more persistently elucidated its interior meaning than Emerson; none has traced its illustrations through more varied fields of thought; and none has spent upon it more passionate faith. It was this apprehension of underlying law that made him an evolutionist before Darwin and Spencer and caused him to accept without hesitation or delay their discoveries in scientific truth as they reached him.

He considered that all nature is moral, but it is even more significant that he saw all morality as law, not less purely the outcome of system and order in the universe than is the geological structure of the eternal hills. The "new teacher" described in the Divinity School address is one who "shall see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart." Such a teacher would necessarily perceive that "the history

of Nature, from first to last, is incessant advance from less to more, from rude to finer organisation, the globe of matter thus conspiring with the principle of undying hope in man." Such a teacher would inevitably insist upon the postponement of private ends to public good and would find in all high types of civilisation the natural evolution of the individual morality. And such a teacher would see also that the severity of law is the secret of beauty in form, and would rejoice with the joy of the artist in obedience to its commands. No, it was not Emerson whose intellect was narrow. Beholding his exultant journey through the various regions dominated by man's imagination, in his hand the wand of reconciliation we can think only of the concluding stanzas in his poem *The Sphinx* :

Up rose the merry Sphinx,
And crouched no more in stone;
She melted into purple cloud,
She silvered in the moon;
She spired into a yellow flame;
She flowered in blossoms red;
She flowed into a foaming wave;
She stood Monadnoc's head.

Thorough a thousand voices
Spoke the universal dame:
Who telleth one of my meanings,
Is master of all I am.

Critics of Emerson from within the pale of organised Christianity have found him unappreciative of the significance of the Christian message ; inconsistent

in his estimates of Christ; and limited in his religious influence by the "vagueness" of his doctrines. None of these charges is thoroughly well-founded. His appreciation of Christianity is positive though not exclusive. As a very young man he wrote to his aunt "It is certain that the moral world, as it exists to the man within the breast, is illustrated, interpreted, defined by the positive institutions that exist in the world; that in the aspect disclosed to a mind in this hour opening in these parts of the earth, Christianity appears the priest, the expounder of God's moral law. It is plainly a fit representative of the Law-giver."

In a sermon delivered from the pulpit he had renounced as a permanent abiding place, he said: "The perspective of time, as it sets everything in the right view, does the same by Christianity. We learn to look at it now as a part of the history of the world; to see how it rests on the broad basis of man's moral nature, but is not itself that basis. . . . Christianity is the most emphatic affirmation of spiritual nature. But it is not the only nor the last affirmation. There shall be a thousand more. Very inconsistent would it be with a soul so possessed with the love of the real and the unseen as Christ's to set bounds to that illimitable ocean. He never said: 'All truth have I revealed.' He plainly affirms the direct contrary: 'I will send you another Teacher, another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth; he will guide you into all truth.'"

It seems a late day at which to point out that Emerson's extraordinary perception of the value in religions that have influenced innumerable believers toward excellence of life, does not diminish the importance of the tribute he pays to Christianity and Christ. It is almost superfluous to add that his repetitions of the truths of Christianity in his own carefully chosen language do not indicate indifference to their source so much as appreciation of their unlimited application. The defence of his opinions and mental attitude toward religion has indeed the colour of impertinence in a generation which gratefully has accepted his contribution to spiritual happiness, and none of his doctrines, vague or definite as they may appear to individual critics, more deeply touches the heart of the present age than his determined consideration of happiness raised to its highest power as the final good of the soul. He early declared himself like Milton "enamoured of moral perfection" and passionately affirmed that it had separated him from men, had watered his pillow and driven sleep from his bed, had tortured him for his guilt and had inspired him with hope. To show that its reward lay in the exquisite delight of the soul was the work of his life. What has crudely been called his "shallow" or his "ineffectual" optimism is widely removed from blind cheerfulness. It is the joy of the spiritual artist who perceives the harmonies of the universe behind its accidental traits, and he has done more than any of his contemporaries to elevate the minds of his

followers to a plane from which they can perceive large moral forces working toward great ends. Of his religious influence, using the words in the sense most appropriate to his breadth of view, nothing more descriptive can be said than is embodied in the Seventh Grace of the ideal Buddhist Recluse: "He exhales the most excellent and unequalled sweet savour of righteousness of life."





CHAPTER IV.

NATURE.

EARLY in 1831 Emerson's young wife had died, and immediately after the severing of his bonds with the church his health so much declined as to necessitate a European trip for its betterment. He went in the winter season, in a little trading brig, and met the various life of the ancient towns to which his rough boat brought him with sad indifference. The cathedrals only seem to have stirred his love of beauty and they prompted him to record his hope that the end of the century would find in New England carving and colour and inscription on the walls of the great churches that surely must arise there.

He went first to Sicily, thence to Naples and Rome, Florence and Venice, and later to London by way of Paris, to Edinburgh and the home of Carlyle. He was not sure that he grew "much wiser or any better" for his travels, but he returned with health restored, and began at once to plan and work upon his slow-growing book *Nature*. The title he chose with

reference to its most comprehensive meaning, and the text contains chiefly reflection upon Nature as symbolic of spirit. It was thus, certainly, that he most often thought of it in his constant interrogation of the visible world for suggestions of the unseen. His aunt had long before directed him to the woods and to the mountains as the sacred places in which God most freely spoke to man; but not until he had reached his full maturity did he turn spontaneously to country solitudes for his inspiration. Then, at last, the gracious beauty of hill and sky and sweet wild growth took possession of his consciousness, and held for him poetic interest. His relations to Nature became intimate, not as Thoreau's were, through examination of minute appearances, but in perhaps a deeper sense through the kinship he felt with forms of creation governed by the same laws that ruled his own activities.

It was supremely characteristic that among the opulent impressions provided by the fervent summers and heroic winters of New England none was more constant or compelling than that made by the stars in their courses. In the mysterious and visionary heavens these shining bodies, aloof and splendid, stood to him for revelation of the eternal light by which he guided his footsteps. His book of Nature opens with an eloquent apostrophe to them.

"If a man would be alone let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds will separate between him and what he

touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are ! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore ; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown ! But every night come out these envoys of beauty and light the Universe with their admonishing smile." Through his later writings also the wide sky and the clear radiance of the planets lend their singular exaltation to his expression of himself. To "Intellect" he says :

Go, speed the stars of Thought
On to their shining goals.

The man of character he sees beneath the open heaven—

Stars rose ; his faith was earlier up :
Fixed on the enormous galaxy,
Deeper and older seemed his eye.

In the Adirondack wilderness he finds a "melancholy better than all mirth" watching the changing skies,

And that no day of life may lack romance,
The spiritual stars rise nightly, shedding down
A private beam into each several heart.

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Suns haste to set, that so remoter lights
Beckon the wanderer to his vaster home.

When Monadnoc speaks it lifts the mind toward the celestial roof above its towering head, and thus determines the accomplishment of the coming pilgrim :

I will give my son to eat
Best of Pan's immortal meat,
Bread to eat, and juice to drain ;
So the coinage of his brain
Shall not be forms of stars, but stars.
Not pictures pale, but Jove and Mars.

In looking upon any landscape far or near, the "point of astonishment" seems to him the meeting of the sky and earth "which may be seen from the first hillock as well as from the top of the Alleghanies." Why, indeed, should man travel when "the stars at night stoop down over the brownest, homeliest common, with all the spiritual magnificence which they shed on the Campagna or on the marble deserts of Egypt" ?

Mourning for his son, he cries in extreme misery ;

For this losing is true dying ;
This is lordly man's down-lying,
This his slow but sure reclining,
Star by star his world resigning,

and later rebukes his individual longing with the austere question,

Wilt thou freeze love's tidal flow,
Whose streams through Nature circling go ?
Nail the wild star to its track
On the half-climbed Zodiac ?

And in the wild exultant poem which he calls *The Dæmonic Love* there is the most impressive picture of any, strangely revealing the effect on the mind of wonder flowing from the mysteries of the natural world :

Unknown, albeit lying near
To men, the path to the Dæmon sphere;
And they that swiftly come and go
Leave no track on the heavenly snow.
Sometimes the airy synod bends,
And the mighty choir descends,
And the brains of men thenceforth,
In crowded and in still resorts,
Teem with unwonted thoughts:
As, when a shower of meteors
Cross the orbit of the earth,
And, lit by fringent air,
Blaze near and far,
Mortals deem the planets bright
Have slipped their sacred bars,
And the lone seaman all the night
Sails, astonished, amid stars.

For accidental Nature, picturesque nooks, local scenes, momentary effects, Emerson had little care. He looked upon the landscape as he looked upon persons and characteristics with his mind fixed upon the whole of which the particular object of his regard formed a part. Here again he worked as an artist, an artist who, had his medium been pigment, frequently would have painted Nature in moods akin to those of Corot and Daubigny, revealing her serene and large significance, sensible of her charms, but interpreting them with a certain severity, a climbing

aspiration toward the upper regions of truth. In many ways he suggests Corot, his native elegance of style, the distinction of his images, his piercing individuality united to his generalising vision, his fusion of colour in a serene grey harmony from which the sense of colour is never absent, his blithe exaltation in the presence of natural objects, all these bring to mind the pictures of the great humble master of French landscape, seeking his foreground in a distance, far enough removed to yield a true perspective.

Only an indifferent reader could assume, however, that Emerson, because he saw broadly, was inaccurate in his seeing. To read one of his more localised descriptive poems is to live for an hour among the sights and sounds of the country, precisely and tenderly realised. The whole poem *Musketaquid*, for example, is filled with such clear and delicate imagery as appears in the following lines :

For me in showers, in sweeping showers, the spring
Visits the valley ;—break away the clouds,—
I bathe in the morn's soft and silvered air,
And loiter willing by yon loitering stream ;
Sparrows far off, and nearer, April's bird,
Blue-coated—flying before from tree to tree,
Courageous sing a delicate overture
To lead the tardy concert of the year.
Onward and nearer rides the sun of May ;
And wide around, the marriage of the plants
Is sweetly solemnised. Then flows amain
The surge of summer's beauty ; dell and crag,
Hollow and lake, hillside and pine arcade,
Are touched with genius. Yonder ragged cliff
Has thousand faces in a thousand hours.

Nearly all the poems have touches of landscape, bright and lovely or dusky and haunting, or sometimes buoyantly conceived in symbolic dress, and informed with the genius of antiquity. To this last group belongs such a Botticelli drawing as this from *May-Day*.

I saw the bud-crowned Spring go forth,
Stepping daily onward north
To greet staid ancient cavaliers
Filing single in stately train.
And who and who are the travellers?
They were Night and Day, and Day and Night,
Pilgrims wight with step forthright.
I saw the Days deformed and low,
Short and bent by cold and snow
The merry Spring threw wreaths on them.

Nothing could be less like the conventional figure of spring in modern poetry. The youth of the season is there, but in the bright free dress of the ancient past; such an image as that of Pallas taming the Satyr, lusty-limbed and powerful beneath the languid grace and frailty of line drooping about her like a clinging garment. One could almost believe that in the poet's plain New England frame abode the ghosts of the early Italians and earlier Greeks who saw nature with such frank eyes and subtle minds. These are the moments when Emerson yielding his spirit to intuitive pre-occupations is most himself, most different from all who surrounded him, taught him, or learned of him. Reading him in his mood of unchastened splendour, when his power

to create forms of pure loveliness unites with his ethical purpose, it is possible to believe him one of the original few belonging to no time or place, but to eternal history. His hand moulds what his mind evokes with the spontaneous impulse of the maker. But it is quite alone with Nature that he attains his loftiest peak. How wearily he drops to earth in company is plainly written on the surface of the Adirondack journal, a poetic record of a camping expedition led by W. J. Stillman, with such inspiring associates as Agassiz and Lowell and others of distinctive intellectual quality. With them journeyed Emerson to the wilderness which was not wilderness enow to his exacting faculty. His commemorative poem teems with the images made familiar by scores of writers upon nature. We hear of the trees of the forest not as mysterious singers rehearsing runes which come from the heart of the universe, but as conifers, five-leaved, three-leaved, and two-leaved; one fifteen feet, one eight feet in girth. We hear of plants sought by the botanist, orchis and gentian, whip-scorpion, rosy polygonum, hypnum, and hydnum, and of birds belonging to the place, the eagle, osprey, raven, woodpecker, and heron; of lizard, salamander, shrew, dragon-fly, minnow, and moth, and of the lusty occupations that engage amateur woodsmen. The seer is ploughing contentedly in harness, subduing his interrogative mind to the objects of his companions' curiosity.

His watchfulness to discern the spiritual causes of

what he felt, to gain some hint of the undiscoverable secret beneath the mask of things was apparent to Mr. Stillman in the Adirondack poem as in no other of his works, but to the reader excluded from personal share in the agreeable experience, and judging only by the reflection in the poem itself it is significant chiefly as showing the power of society to quench fires lighted in solitude.

In his autobiography Mr. Stillman gives an incident of Emerson's life in camp illustrating how far the apostle of forbearance was swung out of his orbit by his intimate contact with new activities and interests. At the outset of the expedition he had with some reluctance purchased a rifle in honour of conformity, an act that restrained the sceptical Longfellow from joining the company. When the day of the hunt arrived he who had named the birds without a gun yielded to the potent influence of "mob fury," and announced that he must understand this passion to kill, and at night he went out jack-hunting in pursuit of the alien knowledge.

Stealing with paddle to the feeding-grounds
Of the red deer, to aim at a square mist.

Utterly unable to see anything resembling a deer when the signal to shoot was given, he refrained until the lucky animal took fright and ran, snorting scorn of his inefficient enemy. Emerson found no other opportunity for deer-hunting and was obliged to renounce his momentary ambition to become a red-slayer.

His defeat was characteristic. No man more intelligently admired skill of hand and fitness to meet the practical conditions of life. He respected the farmer "deep-chested, long-winded, tough, slow and sure, and timely," the "continuous benefactor"; he bade "men of cloth" bow to "the stalwart churls in overalls"; he praised the "all round" New England lad who "*teams it, farms it, peddles*, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth"; but of this ability to perform the plain crude task he had the smallest possible measure. A spade in his hand was an instrument of torture, and he was helpless in the presence of an arable plot of ground calling for the humble craft of an ordinary gardener. "The genius of reading and gardening," he declares, "are antagonistic," and his experience taught him to meddle with no problems of the soil. His description of the havoc wrought by a stroll about his limited estate has reached the heart of many a bookish recluse acquainted with the strange seizures that drive pen-weary fingers to delving in the good brown earth at irregular and unstudied intervals.

"With brow bent, with firm intent, the pale scholar leaves his desk to draw a freer breath and get a juster statement of his thought, in the garden-walk. He stoops to pull up a purslain or a dock that is choking the young corn, and finds there are two; close behind the last is a third; he reaches out his hand to a fourth, behind that are four thousand and one. He

is heated and untuned, and by and by wakes up from his idiot dream of chickweed and red-root to remember his morning thought and to find that with his adamantine purposes he has been duped by a dandelion."

In Nature Emerson saw the perfect theme for scholarship abounding in fresh inspirations, each as novel as the moonrise and sunset of the day, and in urging American students to turn to these he was guiltless of imposing upon them his own method, although he led them toward his own ideal. His counsel to the young writer suggests that he had in mind the life of his friend Thoreau and the swarm of nature-lovers who have followed lazily in that pleasant path.

"But go into the forest," he says, "you shall find all new and undescribed. The honking of the wild geese flying by night; the thin note of the companionable titmouse in the winter day; the fall of swarms of flies, in autumn, from combats high in the air, pattering down on the leaves like rain; the angry hiss of the wood-birds; the pine throwing out its pollen for the benefit of the next century; the turpentine exuding from the tree;—and indeed any vegetation, any animation, any and all, are alike unattempted."¹ Such a passage reveals what the poet of *Brahma* might have made of nature-study in the narrower sense, had he not devoted himself to his larger task. The

¹ *Literary Ethics.*

one thing he could never have been is what he called "a fop of the fields," and what Carlyle designated as a "view-hunter," self-consciously worshipping and saying to himself: "Come, let us make a description!" He felt sensitively the obloquy attaching to the sentimentalist on his knees in the public field, and acknowledged that, "ordinarily, whether we are too clumsy for so subtle a topic, or from whatever cause, as soon as men begin to write on nature, they fall into euphemism"; but he could not renounce the right of returning often to this old theme: "The multitude of false churches accredits the true religion. Literature, poetry, science are the homage of man to this unfathomed secret, concerning which no sane man can affect an indifference or incuriosity."¹ The genuine man of science he respected wholly as he respected the poet, but he visited his wrathless scorn upon botanisers and naturalists inspired by no broader aim than arbitrary analysis of external characteristics, the young scholars who

Love not the flower they pluck and know it not,
And all their botany is in Latin names.

Unless they felt, with Linnæus, in the presence of an unfolding blossom that God in His glory was passing near them, they were devastators and invaders worthy of rebuffs by the offended genius of the natural world.

¹ Essay on *Nature*.

For scientific research and discovery of the high imaginative type he had, as one would expect, the most profound admiration. His lines on the laying of the first trans-Atlantic cable are exultant:

Thought's new-found path
Shall supplement henceforth all trodden ways,
Match God's equator with a zone of art,
And lift man's public action to a height
Worthy the enormous cloud of witnesses,
When linked hemispheres attest his deed.¹

All news of such achievement added assurance to his belief in the unity between the spiritual and material worlds; and it is interesting to reflect that the light in which he saw the universe is the light which has shone in the minds of some of the most advanced psychologists and philosophers of the present day. Late in life John Fiske announced the mental state to which his inquiry of scientific facts had brought him, and the pages upon which he recorded it might have issued with hardly the change of a word from the study in which Emerson listened to the voices of the spirit. How truly Emersonian, for example, is such a passage as this:

"In getting rid of the Devil and regarding the universe as the multiform manifestation of a single all-pervading Deity, we become for the first time pure and uncompromising monotheists, — believers in the ever-living, unchangeable, and all-wise Heav-

¹ *The Adirondacks.*

only Father, in whom we may declare our trust without the faintest trace of mental reservation.

“If we can truly take such a position, and hold it rationally, it is the modern science so apt to be decried by the bats and owls of orthodoxy that justifies us in doing so. For what is the philosophic purport of these beautiful and sublime discoveries with which the keen insight and patient diligence of modern students of science are beginning to be rewarded? What is the lesson that is taught alike by the correlation of forces, by spectrum analysis, by the revelations of chemistry as to the subtle behaviour of molecules inaccessible to the eye of sense, by the astronomy that is beginning to sketch the physical history of countless suns in the firmament; by the palæontology which is slowly unravelling the wonders of past life upon the earth through millions of ages? What is the grand lesson that is taught by all this? It is the lesson of the unity of nature. To learn it rightly is to learn that all the things that we can see and know, in the course of our life in this world, are so intimately woven together that nothing could be left out without reducing the whole marvellous scheme to chaos. Whatever else may be true, the conviction is brought home to us that in all this endless multifariousness there is one single principle at work, that all is tending toward an end that was involved from the very beginning, if one can speak of beginnings and ends where the process is eternal. The whole universe is animated

by a single principle of life, and whatever we see in it, whether to our half-trained understanding and narrow experience it may seem to be good or bad, is an indispensable part of the stupendous scheme.”¹

In similar tone and temper Professor Royce has recently discussed the spirit of modern philosophy, using Emerson’s own phraseology as the most appropriate expression of his deepest conviction,—even while he assures his reader of his independence of mystical processes: “My reason for believing that there is one absolute World-Self, who embraces and is all reality, whose consciousness includes and infinitely transcends our own, in whose unity all the laws of nature and all the mysteries of experience must have their solution and their very being,—is simply that the profoundest agnosticism which you can possibly state in any coherent fashion, the deepest doubt which you can any way formulate about the world or the things that are therein, already presupposes, implies, demands, asserts, the existence of such a World-Self. The agnostic, I say, already asserts this existence—unconsciously, of course, as a rule, but none the less inevitably. For, as we shall find, there is no escape from the infinite Self except by self-contradiction. Ignorant as I am about first causes, I am at least clear, therefore, about the Self. If you deny him, you already in denying affirm him. You reckon ill when you leave him out. Him when you fly, he is the wings. He is the doubter and the

¹ *Through Nature to God.*

doubt. You in vain flee from his presence. The wings of the morning will not aid you. Nor do I mean this as any longer a sort of mysticism. The truth is, I assure you, simply a product of dry logic. When I try to tell you about it in detail, I shall weary you by my wholly unmystical analysis of commonplaces.”¹

Professor Shaler refers to the “sense of unity with the whole of Nature” as “the largest lesson that the naturalist gains from his study of the realm,” and from it he turns hopefully toward larger lessons and happier convictions: “Looking forward on the path on which men are so rapidly advancing, we can discern in some part the state to which he is to attain when his reconciliation with the Nature about him is more completely effected. We can see that the meaning of man’s organic history is to be borne in upon him with such effect as to give him a perspective undreamed of by the ancients. He is to see himself as far more truly divine in origin than the old ideas of his creation led him to believe.”²

When we consider that Emerson came by intuition to the elementary and stupendous conviction beyond which modern science, philosophy, and religion have not yet reached, that he happened by what some of us would call mere accident upon the fortunate opening to his book of thought from which all its contents flowed consistently and spontaneously, we can hardly fail to recognise in him one

¹ *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy.*

² *The Individual.*

of the inexplicable men, one of the artists born with the true vision whose work is happiness because its direction is fixed by an inner certainty of right. Maeterlinck warns us that the poet privileged to form hypotheses and to forge his way ahead of reality often finds that when he imagines himself to be far in advance, he will have done no more than turn in a circle. Such was not Emerson's experience. If the minds most loyally devoted to study of the knowable find in him inspiration, and can still say, with Professor Tyndall, that he is a profoundly religious influence in the supreme sense of the word, it is because he was such a poet as he has himself described: "a beholder of ideas, and an utterer of the necessary and causal." To call him original conveys to the conventional understanding a false impression since he uttered truth which from time to time has enlightened the souls of men in all parts of the world. But he was fundamental; and it is merely recognising his universal quality flowering in the delicately austere environment of New England thought to class him with the artists who stand alone, "the pupil of nobody, the heir of everybody."

His most acute American critic, George Willis Cooke, expresses his attitude toward all local phenomena when he describes his feeling for Concord as having no special significance. "Concord had beauties of its own, but Concord was a part of the universe. It was worthy of study because representative of the whole; it was the whole for which

he sought, the universal for which he yearned. Concord was no Mecca to him; he saw no special sacredness in its flowers, rivers, and ponds." Yet there was no virtue of the pleasant town where his forefathers had lived, and where, after his second marriage, he made his home, that he did not gratefully acknowledge. His house was on the outskirts of the village, with ample space about it, and his walks in the neighbouring fields and pastures gave him the ordered and invigorating joy which interpreters of Nature find in her large and simple aspects. Other writers have made the sky and friendly landscape in that delectable region familiar to us in all its homely and lovable detail, but our imagination is seldom roused as by Emerson's poetic interpretations of it, into which the impressions of the actual world fell like summer rain, "copious but not troublesome to his invulnerable essence." We see his most characteristic relation to Nature in the poem on *Monadnoc Afar*, which he left unprinted:

Dark flower of Cheshire garden,
Red evening duly dyes
Thy sombre head with rosy hues
To fix far-gazing eyes.
Well the Planter knew how strongly
Works thy form on human thought;
I muse what secret purpose had he
To draw all fancies to this spot.

In that octave of brief lines and Saxon words we have the very colour and genius of his art; its sensi-

tive response to the loveliness of visible things, its preoccupation with the message of the invisible. The secret of his influence is revealed in every poem and in every sentence of prose directly addressed to the natural world; he increases our sense of capacity for illimitable life.





CHAPTER V.

CARLYLE.

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WHEN Emerson reached Edinburgh in the course of his European trip, he had much ado to discover the whereabouts of Thomas Carlyle, then roaring unchecked his criticism of life from a solitary farm among desolate heathery hills, unknown as yet to the multitude presently to wrangle over his vociferous dithyrambs, "with clamours dissonant." Carlyle, however, was of more importance to Emerson than Rome or London, and the "young American from Boston" persevered until he found the "good, wise, and pleasant" youth in Scotland whom he sought. The meeting was fortunate. Emerson was welcomed for the homage he brought to the lonely Craigenputtock household, and also because the Carlyles found him "one of the most lovable creatures in himself" they had ever looked upon. Emerson in turn was able to record that he had never seen more amiableness than was in Carlyle's countenance, and that he loved him for his amiability, a grateful comment to remember after the turmoil of



discussion spent by later critics upon his sick and sorry temper.

At Craigenputtock Emerson stayed over one night and "talked and heard talking to his heart's content," then mounted the hill to "vanish like an angel" from the eyes of his host. The friendship that grew out of those few hours of walking over the wide country, discoursing on the questions that interested the two sincere thinkers, was, on Emerson's side at least, a model in the qualities of unselfish devotion, kind forbearance, and wise frankness. It failed to break even under the strain of Carlyle's plunging humour, to which so many principles held sacred by Emerson were entrusted. For the reader interested in tracing correspondences and differences it is an amusing task to follow the thread of likeness in *Sartor Resartus*, which reached America through *Fraser's Magazine* before it was published there in 1836, and in the essays and addresses written by Emerson in the same decade.

It is not difficult to find in the first free flowing of Carlyle's genius certain general ideas, many of them directly imported from Germany, which are reproduced with the same frank appropriation in Emerson's early work, to be firmly knit into the fabric of his later thought. Originality to both writers meant the use of ideas sanctioned by the intuition. Neither was careful of sources, and Emerson in particular shared the gifts his reading gave him with an open liberality that defied criticism.

"I give you fair warning," he wrote to Herman Grimm, after reading his *Essays*, "that, as I alone in America, at this day possess this book of yours, I intend to use my advantage. I advise you to watch me narrowly. I think I shall reproduce you in lectures, poems, essays,—whatever I may in these months be called to write. I have already been quoting you a good many times, within a few days, and it was plain, nobody knew where I became so suddenly learned and discerning."

What he thus sportively confessed he advocated in his serious writing. "The brave man quotes bravely," he said, but also insisted that one must be an inventor to read well; that the mind must be braced by other minds to independent thinking, not supported in eleemosynary idleness. With his multitudinous quotation, and his light-hearted indebtedness to nearly every book which he found it worth his while to read, he has kept as free as Shakespeare from plagiarism in the true sense of that ugly word. His transmuting faculty turned to account every scrap of science and every generalisation of philosophy that matched his conception of life,—moral life, which was all he recognised as fit for contemplation. Carlyle's denouncement of outworn symbols may be found throughout Emerson's writings on religion. Dependence on character in place of dependence on institutions was advocated first stormily by Carlyle, and later, tranquilly, by Emerson. Fichte's ideal of the Literary Man, sympathetically interpreted by

Carlyle is a recognisable ancestor of Emerson's ideal scholar; such a sentence as "the healthy moral nature loves Goodness, and without wonder wholly lives in it," might have been written by either Emerson or Carlyle; the theory that matter is an expression of the world-spirit received from both the immediate welcome of the idealistic nature. Neither of them explained how he arrived at the conclusions that have been the end of so many arguments among the saints and sages whose mouths are stopt with dust. Neither of them created a philosophy, and nothing could be more absurd than to say—as Carlyle unfortunately did say—that Emerson took his "system" largely from *Sartor Resartus* and other of Carlyle's early writings, "working it out, however, in a way of his own." The way in which he worked out such ideas as the two held in common led to the substitution of joy in virtue for pain and self-chastisement, of faith in mankind for exclusive dependence upon special men, of love for intolerance, of beauty and serenity for energy.

In the matter of style his independence of Carlyle is obvious. He pleaded a defective sense of humour in extenuation of his indifference to the heavy wit of *Sartor Resartus*. As a matter of fact, his sense of humour was too fine and too exacting to accept mannerism and artifice as worthy of the Comic Muse. In the playful use of words he was not perhaps facile; and he was wisely shy. In private speech his wit was not so closely constrained, and some excellent

sayings are quoted from his merrier hours, the best, perhaps, a comment inspired by the introduction of an uncongenial person: "Whom God hath put asunder, let not man bring together." But on his printed page his ideas must wear, as he said, "their Greek coat." Superfluity and verbiage were winnowed out of his product as elements of ugliness, where to Carlyle they would have presented themselves as instruments of force.

In the letters for many years exchanged by Emerson and Carlyle after their day at Craigenputtock, we find Emerson the warmer and richer of the two in expressions of affection. Under the delicate restraint characterising his style here as elsewhere burns a quiet ardour that makes easy the reader's acceptance of his statement that a new person was a great event to him and hindered him from sleep. From this new friend he hoped as usual more than he realised, but he freed the essence of his sentiment from all triviality and exaggeration, and lived with it to the end of his days. Lowell speaks of "this loyalty of his that can keep warm for half a century," and his intercourse with Carlyle covered almost that space of time without faltering under the most practical of tests.

His sturdy theory of friendship is suggested in his essay on that interesting relation:

"I wish that friendship should have feet, as well as eyes and eloquence. It must plant itself on the ground, before it vaults over the moon; . . . we

cannot forgive the poet if he spins his thread too fine, and does not substantiate his romance by the municipal virtues of justice, punctuality, fidelity, and pity. . . . The end of friendship is a commerce the most strict and homely that can be joined; more strict than any of which we have experience. . . . We are to dignify to each other the daily needs and offices of man's life and embellish it by courage, wisdom, and unity. It should never fall into something usual and settled, but should be alert and inventive, and add rhyme and reason to what was drudgery." Many writers have spoken with as much wisdom and as gracefully, and it is to the credit of our humanity that so many also have rhymed act to word and exemplified their teaching in their practice. Certainly, however, the ideal advocated has never been more sincerely followed than by Emerson himself in this friendship of his own. Nothing could more convincingly demonstrate his modesty and loyalty, and his willingness to undertake uncongenial labour for the benefit of others than a simple enumeration of his efforts, beginning early and lasting long, to promote Carlyle's interests in this country.

Sartor Resartus was first published in America in 1836 as an independent volume at the instigation of a young engineer named Le-Baron Russell. The preface was written by Emerson, and Carlyle found it "such as no kindest friend could have improved." In the space of a year and a half the book was

reported to have sold to the extent of more than eleven hundred copies, and someone in talking with Emerson remarked that Carlyle's friends might have made a sum for the author by publishing *Sartor* themselves instead of leaving it with a bookseller. Instantly Emerson arranged to print the *French Revolution* in that way, and wrote joyously to Carlyle of the details of publication, concluding:

"Then if so good a book can have a tolerable sale (almost contrary to the nature of a good book, I know), I shall sustain with great glee the new relation of being your banker and attorney." After this, nearly every letter contained some allusion to questions involved in this "new relation," for which Emerson developed an admirable talent. "You may be assured," he writes, "I shall on this occasion summon to the bargain all the Yankee in my constitution and multiply and divide like a lion."

The book was published on the 25th of December, 1837, and Emerson counted upon sending his friend at least seven hundred dollars as the outcome of a year's sales. This sum was exceeded by a number of dollars, and Carlyle wrote to his English correspondents with even more enthusiasm than he betrayed in his letters to Emerson, of the comfort it conveyed. To Emerson he wrote: "You have been very brisk and helpful in this business of the Revolution Book, and I give you many thanks and commendations. It will be a very brave day when cash actually reaches me, no matter what the *number* of the coins, whether

seven or seven hundred, out of Yankee-land; and strange enough, what is not unlikely, if it be the *first* cash I realise for that piece of work,—Angle-land continuing still *insolvent* to me!"¹ And he added a bit of rhodomontade to the effect that he was now beginning to despise the question of ways and means, thus apostrophising poverty in the vein of Teufelsdröckh:

"Thou beggarliest Spectre of Beggary, that hast chased me ever since I was man, come on then, in the Devil's name, let us see what is in thee! Will the Soul of a man, with Eternity within a few years of it, quail before *thee*?"

When the money did arrive he gave ardent thanks to "the mysterious, all-Bounteous Guide of men" and to his "true Brother far over the sea." The true brother, meanwhile, had been turning aside from his personal tasks to push through the publication of two volumes of Carlyle's *Miscellanies*, issued on the same plan as the history, with reference to the utmost benefit to the author. The letters reveal endless attention to detail on Emerson's part; endless consultation with the grateful author (who was not always conveniently prompt with his answers), and the exercise of faculties quite unaccustomed to such arduous claims. The first formal account of the costs and sales of the *French Revolution* was forwarded to Carlyle on the 25th of April, 1839, and Emerson wrote of it:

¹ *The Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence.*

“Behold my account! A very simple thing, is it not! A very mouse, after such months, almost years, of promise! Despise it not, however; for such is my extreme dulness at figures and statements that this nothing has been a fear to me a long time; how to extract it from the bookseller’s promiscuous account with me and from obscure records of my own.”¹

The little sheet of items and figures, punctiliously made up, drew from Carlyle a manly utterance of warm feeling. “A reflection I cannot but make,” he said, “is that at bottom this money was all yours; not a penny of it belonged to me by any law except that of helpful friendship,” and he bids Emerson rejoice that, thanks to him and the books, “and to Heaven over all,” he is for the present no longer poor, but has more money in his possession than for a dozen years preceding, which, despite his invocation to beggary, he found “a blessedness really very considerable.”

For six years the making and sifting of booksellers’ accounts, and the transmission of varying amounts of money accruing from the sales, continued without special incident, Carlyle receiving in all about two thousand dollars from Emerson’s management of his affairs.

Then in the spring of 1843 Carlyle sent to Emerson, in advance of the English publication, his book called *Past and Present*, hoping thus to prevent pirated republication in America. Emerson was

¹ *The Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence.*

obliged to report an evil condition of the book market, brought about within a few months by the cheap press. "Every English book of any name or credit," he wrote, "is instantly converted into a newspaper or coarse pamphlet, and hawked by a hundred boys in the streets of all our cities for 25, 18, or 12 cents; Dickens's *Notes* for 12 cents, *Blackwood's Magazine* for 18 cents, and so on."

His energy arose, however, to meet the new demand upon it, and, with much sagacity, after "perplexing debate with the booksellers," he made arrangements, first with one firm and then with another, still sending Carlyle occasional remittances, amounting in three years to something less than five hundred dollars. Finally, in 1846, he made what seemed to Carlyle "the best of Bargains" with the firm of Wiley & Putnam, who agreed to pay a certain royalty on all the works of Carlyle which they were free to publish, much to Emerson's relief, it may be supposed. References to accounts and remittances now drop out of the correspondence, with Emerson's valour thoroughly proven. And it should be added that Carlyle, also, had shown some activity in the republication of Emerson's *Essays* in England, which was not, however, due to his own impulse, but sprang from the suggestion of Fraser, his publisher.

There is little of Emerson's genius in his correspondence with Carlyle; but of his character, which was the positive basis of his genius, there is much.

His mild breadth of vision, his excellence of temper, and his freedom from egoistic absorption in his affairs diffuse a soft radiance of personality in contrast with the fitful gleam and shadow of Carlyle's uncertain humour; and the warmth of his nature is more apparent in these letters than in any others accessible to the public. A curious strain of tenderness mingled with reverence shows itself in all his phrases, somewhat studied and elaborate in form, but breathing pure sincerity. For many years he sent reiterated invitations and appeals to Carlyle to come with his wife to America and find a home in the Emerson household. The advantages offered by the New England institution called the "Lyceum" he thought peculiarly adapted to Carlyle's needs, as to his own, the lecture being a substitute for the sermon as flexible as the heart of either could desire. Deducing from his personal experience, he wrote :

"The pulpit in our age certainly gives forth an obstructed and uncertain sound, and the faith of those in it, if men of genius, may differ so much from that of those under it, as to embarrass the conscience of the speaker, because so much is attributed to him from the fact of standing there. In the Lyceum nothing is presupposed. The orator is only responsible for what his lips articulate. Then, what scope it allows! You may handle every member and relation of humanity. What could Homer, Socrates, or St. Paul say that cannot be said here? The audience is of all classes, and its character will be deter-

mined always by the name of the lecturer. Why may you not give the reins to your wit, your pathos, your philosophy, and become that good despot which the virtuous orator is ?”¹

Nor did he forget to add to his list of the Lyceum's virtues the worldly profit to be extracted from it ; and again he multiplied and divided “ like a lion,” in order to give Carlyle an accurate impression of the outgo and income to be expected from a lecturing tour in America. “ You may board in Boston in a ‘ gigmanic ’ style for \$8 per week, including all domestic expenses,” he wrote in 1835. “ Eight dollars per week is the board paid by the permanent residents at the Tremont House,—probably the best hotel in North America. There and at the best hotels in New York, the lodger for a few days pays at the rate of \$1.50 per day.” He concluded his estimate with the assurance that he had given “ rates of expenses where economy is not studied.” To the present age such a picture of cheapness and opportunity, combining suggestions of the “ plain living and high thinking,” since become a byword, brings a sense of regret that the cool, clear social atmosphere in which spiritual voices had so loud a sound has completely passed. In a denser air of more complex claims it is possible that the peculiar freshness and pungency of Emerson's utterance would have been less sustained. He seems in his *Essays* to dwell in a land where there is ample room for the mind to move

¹ *The Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence.*

without encountering material obstacles to its generalisation. He felt the opposite influence in Carlyle's work and defined it with an acute appreciation of the sense of mass conveyed by it, a sense in which his own writings are so notably lacking.

"I thought as I read this piece," he said, referring to the *Diamond Necklace*, "that your strange genius was the instant fruit of your London. It is the aroma of Babylon. Such as the great metropolis, such is this style; so vast, enormous, related to all the world, and so endless in details. I think you see as pictures every street, church, parliament-house, barrack, baker's shop, mutton-stall, forge, wharf, and ship, and whatever stands, creeps, rolls, or swims thereabouts, and make all your own. Hence, your encyclopediacal allusion to all knowables, and the virtues and vices of your panoramic pages. Well, it is your own; and it is English, and every word stands for somewhat, and it cheers and fortifies me."¹

If Carlyle's genius is the aroma of Babylon, Emerson's is the aroma of Shiloh, where the gentle Eli exhorted his people to give over the worship of strange gods and to follow the moral law. Carlyle found his friend's benign detachment and abstract vision unsatisfying, and urged upon him the kind of art in which he himself was conspicuously successful. "You *tell* us with piercing emphasis," he said, "that man's soul is great; *show* us a great soul of a man in some work symbolic of such: this is the seal of such

¹ *The Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence.*

a message, and you will feel by and by that you are called to this. I long to see some concrete Thing, some Event, Man's Life, American Forest or piece of Creation, which this Emerson loves and wonders at, well *Emersonised*, depicted by Emerson, filled with the life of Emerson, and cast far from him then to live by itself."

Had Emerson attempted such a task it would have been approached in the spirit he brought to his orations, and the result might easily have been history or biography of the sort that illuminates from within, showing the play of moral forces through all forms of human energy. It is interesting to conjecture how he would have borne himself among the crowding figures of history. In Carlyle's *French Revolution* what he found admirable was the presence of humanity. "We have men in your story," he told the author, "and not names merely; always men, though I may doubt sometimes whether I have the historic men." His affectionate interest was not warped into prejudice; he insisted, with sufficient moderation surely, that the style might be "more simple, less Gothically efflorescent." "You will say," he added, "no rules for the illumination of windows can apply to the Aurora Borealis. However, I find refreshment when every now and then a special fact slips into the narrative couched in sharp and business-like terms. This character-drawing in the book is certainly admirable, the lines are ploughed furrows; but there was cake and ale before though

thou be virtuous. Clarendon surely drew sharp lines for me in Falkland, Hampden, and the rest without defiance or sky-vaulting."

A quarter of a century later the time was past for constructive criticism between the two, and concerning *Frederick the Great* Emerson had only words of soaring congratulation. Even in his journal he declared it to be "infinitely the wittiest book that ever was written;—a book that one would think the English people would rise up in mass and thank the author for by cordial acclamation." He had, however, too much the seeing eye to miss Carlyle's essential shortcoming in looking dispassionately at his total effect. On his second visit to him, made fourteen years after the first, he was able to admire anew, and even found himself "taken by surprise" by qualities he had not guessed before. But in his notes, with one of his amazing and acute juxtapositions, he clearly defined the destructive weakness that undermined the work of strength:

"In Carlyle as in Byron, one is more struck with the rhetoric than with the matter. He has manly superiority rather than intellectuality, and so makes good hard hits all the time. There is more character than intellect in every sentence, herein strongly resembling Samuel Johnson."

The correspondence lasted until 1872, nine years before Carlyle's death, and left the writers almost where it found them, both in friendship and in mental attitude. Each had maintained a gentle courtesy





toward the opinions of the other, tolerating disagreement with that "beautiful behaviour" defined by Emerson as the finest of the fine arts. Each continued to find his friend after many years a fresh delight. "I clatter my chains with joy," wrote Emerson on the receipt of the last volumes of *Frederick the Great*, "as I did forty years ago, at your earliest gifts." Time had brought a measure of fame to each, but discerning critics found Carlyle exhausted by repetition of his message and the ever-increasing emphasis laid upon it, while Emerson was inexhaustible as a source of mental cheer, so perfect had been the harmony of his development and the unity of his conception. Carlyle's belief in human nature, at first apparent through his exaggerated denunciation, had waned and given way to what Lowell called a deep disdain, but what perhaps was more truly a perverse ignorance of universal human qualities, and a growing, dark despair of moral improvement in mankind. "Alas! then," he wrote in the *French Revolution*, "is man's civilisation only a wrappage, through which the savage nature of him can still burst, infernal as ever? Nature still makes him; and has an Infernal in her as well as a Celestial." The Infernal became continually clearer to his vision, and the Celestial more clouded to his infrequent upward glance. The pessimism threatening his capacity for lasting service at the outset of his course had become deepened and fixed by the time he reached its end, and he passed out of life like a spent torch which, bravely as it had

burned and flashed, had failed to light one of the inextinguishable altar-fires kept alive by the faithful worshippers of goodness.

With Emerson it was otherwise. His moral optimism saw goodness environing the world and flowing into every humblest heart held open to it. The beauty of holiness revealed itself to him wherever he looked ; and within himself he found assurance that in unity with the moral order is gained eternal peace beyond the chaos and horror of accident and crime. As life enriched him with mild experience and the fruit of contemplation, he consistently studied and taught the comfort of his serene faith. "How dear, how soothing to man, arises the idea of God, peopling the lonely place, effacing the scars of our mistakes and disappointments." Beside his happy freedom from complaint and idle interrogation of insoluble mysteries, such a voice as Carlyle's sounds like the noisy whining of undisciplined childhood. Yet the two men were at one in their love of the truth under formula and sham, and the bonds uniting them were recognised by both to the last.





CHAPTER VI.

“MAN, THE REFORMER.”

DURING the interval between the first and second meetings of Carlyle and Emerson the life of the latter ran serenely in channels that were narrow but deep. He was touched by his share of the frost and darkness that recur inevitably in normal human experience. His home in Concord had been planned for the inclusion of his brother Charles in his family, but before it was in order Charles had died, leaving Emerson a mourner.

“You must be content henceforth with only a piece of your husband,” he wrote to his wife, “for the best of his strength lay in the soul with which he must no more on earth take counsel.”

In 1841 he lost his eldest boy, and readers of the *Threnody* know to what noble uses he turned his grief. His work, after he left the pulpit of the Second Church, continued to be that of an ethical teacher, but he was oftener on the lecture platform than in the pulpit.

“You cannot preach to people unless they will

hear," he wrote to his brother William, and in his earlier lectures he even abandoned what he called his "ethics and theologies" for natural history, which gave him admirable illustrations of his unalterable theory of the unity in nature. As early as 1833, immediately after his return from Europe, he gave an address before the Natural History Society, in which, as in his later writings, he showed his striking appreciation of the larger scientific spirit. "As books can never teach the use of books, neither does science, when it becomes technical, keep its own place in the mind." Its place in the mind was what he never forgot or misunderstood.

For about three years he supplied the pulpit at East Lexington, near Concord, and for a longer time he continued to preach occasionally to hearers willing to accept him on his own terms of doctrine and without question. Obviously he longed to move men's hearts from the place of prophecy and worship to which he had been dedicated. It is impossible to think of him as without susceptibility to the beauty and lovable quality of the institutions he was forced by his conscience to renounce. Unity, too, for which he had such constant concern, must have seemed to him a treasurable element in religious worship, even while he sacrificed to individuality of judgment. But the great thing was to speak truth, and this he could do most freely from the Lyceum, the praises of which he had sung to Carlyle.

In 1840 he wrote in his journal that in all his lec-

tures he had taught one doctrine, the infinitude of the private man, to find this readily accepted, "even with loud commendation," so long as he called the lecture Art, or Politics, or Literature, or the Household, but that as soon as he called it Religion everyone was shocked, although it was only the application of the same truth to a new class of facts. His lectures were certainly received with growing enthusiasm, Lowell writing of the Phi Beta Kappa speech in 1837, that it was "an event without any former parallel in our literary annals, a scene always to be treasured in the memory for its picturesque and its inspiration." It is not now easy to realise the "enthusiasm of approval" or the "grim silence of foregone dissent" in the listeners crowding the aisles and clustering at the windows. Neither is it easy to understand the academic point of view that was startled by the homely allusions to "the meal in the firkin, the milk in the pan." The address contains nothing startling to the mind of the present day, and the amount of shock it conveyed to its audience measures with considerable approach to accuracy the change that has taken place in the American point of view in the last seventy years. The young lecturer told the breathless auditors that life and action are more necessary than books to the true scholar, that the scholar should trust himself and go down into the secrets of his own mind to learn the secrets of all minds, that he should not let himself be influenced even by genius and should

read for inspiration rather than guidance, that the common, the familiar, and the low are as worthy of exploration as the antique and the remote ; that Americans are weakened and intimidated by listening to the courtly Muses of Europe, and that the true office of the American scholar is to walk on his own feet, work with his own hands, and speak his own mind. Broadly interpreted, this teaching has many elements and features in common with Matthew Arnold's teaching to his countrymen on the absorbing subject of culture, superficially opposed as the two doctrines appear.

Perfection resides in an "inward condition of the mind and spirit and not in an outward set of circumstances," Arnold proclaims almost in Emerson's words. We must attain this perfection by getting to know "on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been known and thought in the world ; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits which we now follow stanchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them stanchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically." The subtle humour of this is not Emerson's, but the thought was among his most cherished convictions. And the idea of culture as the harmonious development of all the powers for beauty and for the benefit of human nature is at one with Emerson's theory of individual development.

The scholar in the end is “one who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts.” But Emerson adjures the young scholar of America to turn away from European standards and trust his instincts, and Arnold urges Englishmen to listen to the criticism of foreigners. Both were conforming to Arnold’s belief that “the real *unum necessarium* for us is to come to our best at all points.” This was what he with his discussion of “Hebraism” and “Hellenism” was aiming at, and this was equally the aim of Emerson’s warnings and entreaties. Each held fast to the great assumption that culture involves the co-operation of the moral with the intellectual sense. Each spoke to the inner need of his public, and to each that public “came round” as Emerson predicted, with the slow swing of the aggregate mind.

Arnold could not address Emerson’s counsel, “Trust thyself” to the common Englishman of his time who, together with the common American, was, he thought, more than enough disposed already to trust himself, but he was quite ready to tell us that we could not heed Emerson too diligently or prize him enough when he spoke of the happiness eternally attached to the true life in the spirit. And he recognised the double lesson to be learned from his teaching, the lesson for England, and the lesson for America : “To us,” he said in his American lecture on Emerson, “to us he shows for guidance his

lucid freedom, his cheerfulness and hope; to you his dignity, delicacy, serenity, elevation." None of these qualities was absent from the oration which Doctor Holmes somewhat conventionally called "our intellectual Declaration of Independence."

The year following the Phi Beta Kappa speech came the Divinity School Address, and during the intervening months ten lectures were delivered in the form of a series under the title of *Human Culture*. Parts of these lectures appeared later in the *Essays* which were sent out as separate papers on subjects more or less connected with an ethical intention, but without any outward suggestion of unity. Emerson would perhaps have cast additional light on his attitude of mind for the general reader had he retained for the *Essays* the title of the lecture series and thus emphasised the idea of an inclusive culture, drawing from all forms of human activity; "a discipline so universal as to demonstrate that no part of a man was made in vain." It was the idea of a constructive thinker, and Emerson's service in constructive criticism of life is frequently underestimated.

In the essay on *Heroism*, which probably is almost identical with the lecture of that title, we find little of hero-worship in the sentimental sense of the word. For a young man, recently engaged in opposing public opinion at the peril of his own interests, Emerson looked with extraordinary detachment upon the quality he illustrated. Nothing is more common than to see men drunk with the virtue they are

practising, and unwilling to give it less than the highest and most pompous place in the list of divine attributes. What, then, could be more refreshing than Emerson's description of the heroic class.

“Sport is the bloom and glow of a perfect health. The great will not condescend to take anything seriously; all must be as gay as the song of a canary, though it were the building of cities or the eradication of old and foolish churches and nations which have cumbered the earth long thousands of years. Simple hearts put all the history and customs of this world behind them, and play their own game in innocent defiance of the Blue Laws of the world; and such would appear, could we see the human race assembled in vision, like little children frolicking together, though to the eyes of mankind at large they wear a stately and solemn garb of works and influences.”

According to the custom already fixed by Emerson, the abstract idea of heroism in the lecture was presented in a generalised form. There was one pointed exception, however, that of Elijah Lovejoy's then recent martyrdom. Lovejoy was a Presbyterian minister, and editor of the St. Louis *Observer* through which he strove to awaken public sentiment to the evils of slavery. He was driven from St. Louis to Alton, Illinois, where he again established a paper and continued his anti-slavery work. Three of his presses were destroyed, and he was requested by the citizens of Alton to retire from the charge of

his paper. This he refused to do, and ordered a new press. Upon its arrival a mob gathered and demanded it. Lovejoy and a small band of supporters were attacked and Lovejoy was shot dead.

Emerson evidently felt that this was a time to bring home to his hearers the practical application of his doctrines, and it is told of him that toward the end of his lecture, his audience thrilling to his account of heroism in other lands and ancient times, he looked steadily down into their eyes with a significant gravity, and reminded them of their own hero. "It was but the other day that the brave Lovejoy gave his breast to the bullets of a mob, for the rights of free speech and opinion, and died when it was better not to live."

The end of the lecture is touched by the sadness of premonition, and it is not impossible that Emerson's clear mind was already discerning the calamity of civil strife a quarter of a century in the future. His sturdy optimism bent for a moment beneath the innate melancholy of the human heart reviewing human destiny:

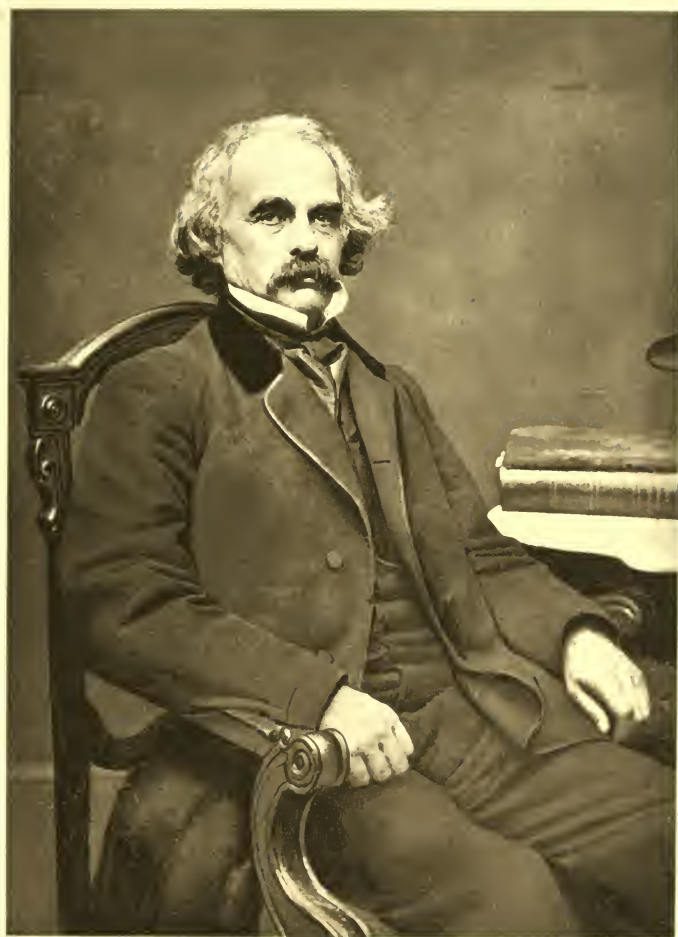
"In the gloom of our ignorance of what shall be, in the hour when we are deaf to the higher voices, who does not envy those who have seen safely to an end their manful endeavour? Who that sees the meanness of our politics but inly congratulates Washington that he is long already wrapped in his shroud, and for ever safe; that he was laid sweet in his grave, the hope of humanity not yet subjugated

in him? Who does not sometimes envy the good and brave who are no more to suffer from the tumults of the natural world, and await with curious complacency the speedy term of his own conversation with finite nature? And yet the love that will be annihilated sooner than treacherous has already made death impossible, and affirms itself no mortal but a native of the deeps of absolute and inextinguishable being."

After the controversy caused by the Divinity School Address, Emerson expected small audiences for his lectures, but his next course, on the broad subject of *Human Life*, was largely attended. In 1840 and 1841 he was too much occupied with getting out his volume of *Essays* and with the project of the transcendental magazine called *The Dial*, to undertake regular lecturing. The one lecture that he did give, on *Man, the Reformer* is interesting as indicating his temper toward the stirring of discontent with the existing order that pushed its way to the surface in New England about this time at so many separate points. Although he was fervent and early in preaching the reform of the Church and of methods of religious worship, he was in no sense what is commonly called a professional reformer. Fanaticism annoyed him and repelled him, and he was quick to observe and analyse the weakness of the systems for social regeneration springing up about him. None of their follies escaped his kind and penetrating gaze. He was a critic but he was

not a contriver. He possessed none of the Yankee ingenuity that found its account in making mechanical toys which would run for a limited space of time and attract the attention of the idle world without winning its respect. Truth only, and personal regeneration roused his imagination and compelled his faith. Such communities as Brook Farm, in which the members attempted to combine agriculture, scholarship, and art to their common benefit, he looked upon with suspicious sympathy as the sincere efforts of sincere men to better the world but as "away from his work." He observed that professed philanthropists, "it is strange and horrible to say," are apt to be altogether odious, to be shunned as "the worst of bores and ranters." How many of them must he have been unable to shun in his hospitable home at Concord! The days were brimming with protests against Church and State, against meat-eating and slave-keeping, against drinking and against civilised apparel, against the subjection of women and against class distinctions. Emerson had the same objection to dogmatism in reform, he said, as to dogmatism in conservatism, yet he was far too conscious of the problem of suffering in the world not to respect the class that spent itself foolishly but honestly on ineffectual schemes for bringing about happiness for the masses.

He felt the pain of the wretched and the poor without the frenzy for revolutionary methods impelling his warm-hearted and hot-headed com-





panions. His way of changing existing conditions was by conforming his private life to his ideal. “I think we must clear ourselves, each one,” he says, “by the interrogation, whether we have earned our bread to-day by the hearty contribution of our energies to the common benefit; and we must not cease to tend to the correction of flagrant wrongs, by laying one stone aright every day.”

This was not wholly the method of the Brook Farmers, whose interesting social venture made so deep an impression upon their contemporaries, but Emerson in his account of the enterprise made obvious its charm, with the element of childishness that both modified and increased it:

“The Founders of Brook Farm should have this praise,” he said, “that they made what all people try to make, an agreeable place to live in. All comers, even the most fastidious, found it the pleasantest of residences. It is certain that freedom from household routine, variety of character and talent, variety of work, variety of means of thought and instruction, art, music, poetry, reading, masquerade, did not permit sluggishness or despondency; broke up routine. There is agreement in the testimony that it was, to most of the associates, education; to many, the most important period of their life, the birth of valued friendships, their first acquaintance with the riches of conversation, their training in behaviour. The art of letter writing, it is said, was immensely cultivated. Letters were

always flying not only from house to house, but from room to room. It was a perpetual picnic, a French Revolution in small, an Age of Reason in a patty pan." Then he placed his wise finger upon the point of weakness: "People cannot live together in any but necessary ways. The only candidates who will present themselves will be those who have tried the experiment of independence and ambition, and have failed; and none others will barter for the most comfortable equality the chance of superiority. Then all communities have quarrelled. Few people can live together on their merits. There must be kindred, or mutual economy, or a common interest in their business or other external tie."

Emerson, nevertheless, was sufficiently swayed by the general movement of the society with whose members he was intimate to attempt one or two individual innovations in his own household. There was a serious and kindly but wholly ineffective attempt to introduce a common table for the family and the servants; an arrangement that would undoubtedly have pleased Emerson who was constantly oppressed by the personal service of paid attendants, and who was always ready to "respect the burden." The servants did not, however, so readily yield the independence of their separate table and the matter was dropped. It also troubled Emerson that his roof sheltered so few people and he invited the Alcotts to make their home with him, a catastrophe averted by the good sense of Mrs.

Alcott. But in the main he was content to fulfil and not destroy the law in even the simple matter of family organisation. Thoreau he left to his hut, Ripley to his farm, without undue expostulation or supercilious thanksgiving that he was not as they, but with a fixed determination to go his individual way according to his individual judgment, which on the whole accorded with the judgment of the majority in questions of practical living.

Mr. Burrell Curtis, who with his brother was one of the Brook Farm boarders, happily describes Emerson as the “sympathising leader and moderating patron” of the reforms that sprang about him, although the moderation was frequently more conspicuous than the leadership. Mr. Curtis looks back to his influence as powerful for good in the years between 1835 and 1842 when the young Curtises were fresh from school and ready for high philosophy and lowly tasks. “His large endowment of cheerful humour, of intellectual acuteness, and of sober common sense did not prevent his holding persistently aloft, in an exceptional degree, the torch of the ideal in everything; and though his thought was usually characterised by profundity, comprehensiveness, and severe balance,—albeit it was often too fine-spun and mystical,—he was so sanguine, and so optimistically enamoured of his ideals, as not unfrequently to overlook the exorbitancy and impracticability of some of them. He was an ardent apostle of ‘liberty’ even to the apparent obeying of one’s ‘whims’; but he

was an equally ardent and strenuous apostle of 'law' in its highest or most stringent senses. Nature's law (which includes the moral law) ordains liberty also ; and while Emerson stands on the one hand stoutly for freedom, independence, self-reliance, heroism, nay, even inconsistency and nonconformity—he stands on the other hand as piously and immovably, like a rapt saint, for obedience to natural and moral law. Our coming into contact with this New England 'movement' (called in our time 'Transcendentalism'), and especially with its leader and moderator, proved to be the cardinal event of our youth ; and I cannot but think that the seed then sown took such deep root as to flower continuously in our later years, and make us both the confirmed 'Independents' that we were and are, whilst fully conscious at the same time of the obligation of living in all possible harmony with our fellows." This final sentence admirably describes Emerson's conscious and unconscious conduct of life. The utmost possible independence and "all possible" harmony with his environment formed precisely the goal at which he aimed, and which he came as near to reaching as anyone whose efforts are recorded.

In the *Lecture on the Times* read at the end of 1841 the subject of reform is again treated and additional emphasis laid on its darker aspects. The following passages show the moderator with his wand of leadership held low :

"The young men who have been vexing society

for these last years with regenerative methods seem to have made this mistake ; they all exaggerated some special means, and all failed to see that the Reform of Reforms must be accomplished without means.

“The Reforms have their high origin in an ideal justice, but they do not retain the purity of an idea. They are quickly organised in some low, inadequate form, and present no more poetic image to the mind than the evil tradition which they reprobated. They mix the fire of the moral sentiment with personal and party heats, with measureless exaggerations, and the blindness that prefers some darling measure to justice and truth. Those who are urging with most ardour what are called the greatest benefits of mankind, are narrow, self-pleasing, conceited men, and affect us as the insane do. They bite us and we run mad also. I think the work of the reformer as innocent as other work that is done around him ; but when I have seen it near I do not like it better. It is done in the same way, it is done profanely, not piously ; by management, by tactics and clamour. It is a buzz in the ear. I cannot feel any pleasure in sacrifices which display to me such partiality of character. We do not want actions but men ; not a chemical drop of water, but rain ; the spirit that sheds and showers actions, countless endless actions. . . . Whilst therefore I desire to express the respect and joy I feel before this sublime connection of reforms now in their infancy around us, I urge the more earnestly the paramount duties of self-reliance. . . . We say then

that the reforming movement is sacred in its origin ; in its management and details timid and profane. These benefactors hope to raise man by improving his circumstances ; by combination of that which is dead they hope to make something alive. In vain. By new infusions alone of the spirit by which he is made and directed can he be re-made and re-inforced."

In this attitude of mind lies the explanation of Emerson's apparent inconsistencies. We find him advocating reform and deprecating reforms. In writing to a lady who wanted him to assist in calling a convention for the purpose of agitating the subject of the political rights of women, he said that he did not deny the wrongs of women. If they felt wronged then they were wronged. But he did not like the idea of a public convention called by women, nor did he fancy the idea of women wishing for political rights, and he imagined that "a woman whom all men would feel to be the best" would decline such privileges if they were offered. Yet on account of his sympathy with all movements of the mind toward individual freedom he allowed his name to be used, expressing privately his regret that the occasion was a public one. When he was urged to join the Brook Farmers, he declared himself an unpromising candidate for any society. "At the name of a society," he said, "all my repulsions play, all my quills rise and sharpen." Yet he wrote in his journal that he approved every wild action of the experimenters.

When he made his first speech on Slavery, in 1837, he spoke strongly for the right of free speech, but feebly against the sin of slavery. It was not until seven years later that his indignation flamed beyond the bounds of his earlier judgment. In his address on the Anniversary of the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies, he depicts the submergence of his milder mood by the passion of human sympathy. It was not a day to be forgotten by those who heard his rich baritone uttering these words :

“Forgive me, fellow-citizens, if I own to you, that in the last few days that my attention has been occupied with this history, I have not been able to read a page of it without the most painful comparisons. Whilst I have read of England, I have thought of New England. Whilst I have meditated in my solitary walks on the magnanimity of the English Bench and Senate, reaching out the benefit of the law to the most helpless citizen in her world wide realm, I have found myself oppressed by other thoughts. As I have walked in the pastures and along the edge of the woods, I could not keep my imagination on those agreeable figures, for other images that intruded on me. I could not see the great vision of the patriots and senators who have adopted the slave’s cause ; they turned their backs on me. No : I see other pictures,—of mean men. I see very poor, very ill-clothed, very ignorant men, not surrounded by happy friends,—to be plain,—poor black

men of obscure employment as mariners, cooks, or stewards, in ships, yet citizens of this our Commonwealth of Massachusetts,—freeborn as we,—whom the slave-laws of the States of South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana have arrested in the vessels in which they visited those ports and shut up in jails so long as the vessel remained in port, with the stringent addition, that if the shipmaster fails to pay the costs of this official arrest and the board in jail, these citizens are to be sold for slaves to pay that expense. This man, these men I see, and no law to save them. Fellow-citizens this law will not be hushed up any longer.”

After this there came in steady sequence Anti-Slavery speeches of noble and chivalrous tone. And thus it was with all the vital questions of Emerson's day. His reserve, his cautious balancing of opposing sides, his dislike of haste and of misrule, gave a weight to his final judgment that could not have been won in any other way. Ultimately he was found on the side of all enduring measures for the amelioration of evil conditions. The trait to which Mr. Sanborn pays eloquent tribute in the little *Beacon Biography* which, within its narrow limits, is the best that has been written for Emerson, the trait of “instinctive prudence which kept him out of compromising situations, and left so little ground for humiliation and vain regrets,” is the trait that made of him the ideal reformer, in whose hands safely could be left the issues of society and government.

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“It was not caution,” his old friend says, “nor coldness nor selfish regard, but like the watchful care of a guardian spirit, such as the Demon of Socrates, so much disputed.” His followers, like those of Socrates, might learn from him to “become good men and true, capable of doing their duty by house and household, by relations and friends, by city and fellow-citizens.” If the conjunction of his name with that of the mighty Athenian should seem presumptuous, one has only to remember that Socrates also was once “a young man in a library,” a young artist, convinced of his commission to promote the intellectual and moral improvement of mankind.





CHAPTER VII.

THE DIAL.

WITH this attitude toward unassimilated measures of reform, it is not strange that Emerson regarded the project of a Transcendental magazine with some distrust beneath his sincere sympathy with the aims of its founders. No one, in fact, was so strongly impressed by its possibilities as to wish to assume personal responsibility for it, and it was at least a year after it was first suggested as a practicable scheme before the first number was published. Its establishment grew out of numerous discussions among the members of the Transcendental Club who desired an organ through which they could speak their message to the outer world. This club, which was called at first the "Symposium," was merely an informal gathering of a few very earnest people who met together to talk about the subjects in which they all were interested. These people, among them Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, Emerson, Bronson Alcott, George Ripley, and Elizabeth Peabody, were, according to the prospectus

of *The Dial*, possessed in common of "the love of intellectual freedom and the hope of social progress," and were "united by sympathy of spirit, not by agreement in speculation." Emerson repudiated the idea held by many outsiders that some movement in literature, philosophy, or religion was on foot or even in the air. "There was no concert," he said, "only here and there two or three men or women who read and wrote, each alone, with unusual vivacity. Perhaps they only agreed in having fallen upon Coleridge and Wordsworth and Goethe, then on Carlyle, with pleasure and sympathy. Otherwise, their education and reading were not marked, but had the American superficialness, and their studies were solitary." The order of the meetings as described in one of Alcott's *Conversations* was of an extreme simplicity. There was no chairman, but the senior member took precedence to the extent of inviting the other members to make remarks, and Mr. Alcott artlessly adds: "I believe there was seldom an inclination on the part of any to be silent." There appears, however, to have been singularly little self-confidence on the part of all concerned in *The Dial*. Margaret Fuller writes shortly before its publication, "We cannot show high culture and I doubt about vigorous thought," and she expected, in accepting the post of editor, to write but little, to hazard only "a few critical remarks, or an unpretending chalk-sketch now and then." The spirit in which the attempt was made is defined by Emerson in the

introductory article of the first number, with all his habitual regard for exact statement, though with less than his habitual distinction of style:

“The Editors to the Reader.

“We invite the attention of our countrymen to a new design. Probably not quite unexpected or unannounced will our journal appear, though small pains have been taken to secure its welcome. Those who have immediately acted in editing the present number can not accuse themselves of any unbecoming forwardness in their undertaking, but rather of a backwardness, when they remember how often in many private circles the work was projected, how eagerly desired, and only postponed because no individual volunteered to combine and concentrate the free-will offerings of many co-operators. With some reluctance the present conductors of this work have yielded themselves to the wishes of their friends, finding something sacred and not to be withstood in the importunity which urged the production of a new journal in a new spirit.

“As they have not proposed themselves to the work, neither can they lay any the least claim to an option or determination of the spirit in which it is conceived, or to what is peculiar in the design. In that respect, they have obeyed, though with great joy, the strong current of thought and feeling, which, for a few years past, has led many sincere persons in New England to make new demands on literature and to reprobate that rigour of our conventions of religion

and education which is turning us to stone, which renounces hope, which looks only backward, which asks only such a future as the past, which suspects improvement and holds nothing so much in horror as new views and the dreams of youth.

“With these terrors the conductors of the present journal have nothing to do,—not even so much as a word of reproach to waste. They know that there is a portion of the youth and of the adult population of this country who have not shared them; who have, in secret or in public, paid their vows to truth and freedom; who love reality too well to care for names; and who live by a faith too earnest and too profound to suffer them to doubt the eternity of its object, or to shake themselves free from its authority. Under the fictions and customs which occupied others, these have explored the Necessary, the Plain, the True, the Human, and so gain a vantage-ground which commands the history of the past and present.

“No one can converse much with different classes of society in New England without remarking the progress of a revolution. Those who share in it have no external organisation, no badge, no creed, no name. They do not vote, or print or even meet together. They do not know each others’ faces or names. They are united only in a common love of truth and love of its work. They are of all conditions and constitutions. Of these acolytes, if some are happily born and well-bred, many are, no doubt, ill dressed, ill placed, ill made, with as many scars of

hereditary vice as other men. Without pomp, without trumpet, in lonely and obscure places, in solitude, in servitude, in compunctions and privations, trudging beside the team in the dusty road, or drudging a hireling in other men's cornfields, schoolmasters who teach a few children rudiments for a pittance, ministers of small parishes of the obscurer sects, lone women in dependent condition, matrons and young maidens, rich and poor, beautiful and hard-favoured, without concert or proclamation of any kind, they have silently given in their several adherence to a new hope, and in all companies do signify a greater trust in the nature and resources of man than the laws or the popular opinions will well allow.

“This spirit of the time is felt by every individual with some difference—to each one casting its light upon the objects nearest to his temper and habits of thought: to one coming in the form of special reforms in the state; to another in modifications of the various callings of men, and the customs of business; to a third, opening a new scope for literature and art; to a fourth, in philosophical insight; to a fifth, in the vast solitudes of prayer. It is in every form a protest against usage, and a search for principles. In all its movements it is peaceable, and in the very lowest marked with a triumphant success. Of course it rouses the opposition of all which it judges and condemns; but it is too confident in its tone to comprehend an objection, and so builds no outworks for possible defence against contingent enemies. It has

the step of Fate, and goes on existing like an oak or a river,—because it must.

“In literature this influence appears not yet in new books so much as in the higher tone of criticism. The antidote to all narrowness is the comparison of the record with nature, which at once shames the record, and stimulates to new attempts. Whilst we look at this, we wonder how any book has been thought worthy to be preserved. There is somewhat in all life untranslatable into language. He who keeps his eye on that will write better than others, and think less of his writing and of all writing. Every thought has a certain imprisoning, as well as uplifting quality, and, in proportion to its energy on the will, refuses to become an object of intellectual contemplation. Thus, what is great usually slips through our fingers; and it seems wonderful how a lifelike word ever comes to be written. If our journal shares the impulses of the time, it can not now prescribe its own course. It can not foretell in orderly propositions what it shall attempt. All criticism should be poetic, unpredictable; superseding, as every new thought does, all foregone thoughts, and making a new light on the whole world. Its brow is not wrinkled with circumspection, but serene, cheerful, adoring. It has all things to say, and no less than all the world for its final audience.

“Our plan embraces much more than criticism; were it not so, our criticism would be nought. Everything noble is directed on life, and this is. We do

not wish to say pretty or curious things, or to reiterate a few propositions in varied forms, but, if we can, to give expression to that spirit which lifts men to a higher platform, restores to them the religious sentiment, brings them worthy aims and pure pleasures, purges the inward eye, makes life less desultory, and, through raising man to the level of nature, takes away its melancholy from the landscape, and reconciles the practical with the speculative powers.

“But perhaps we are telling our little story too gravely. There are always great arguments at hand for a true action, even for the writing of a few pages. There is nothing but seems near it, and prompts it,—the sphere in the ecliptic, the sap in the apple-tree, every fact, every appearance, seem to persuade to it.

“Our means correspond with the ends we have indicated. As we wish, not to multiply books, but to report life, our resources are not so much the pens of practised writers, as the discourse of the living, and the portfolios which friendship has opened to us. From the beautiful recesses of private thought; from the experience and hope of spirits which are withdrawing from all old forms, and seeking in all that is new somewhat to meet their inappeasable longings; from the secret confession of genius afraid to trust itself to aught but sympathy; from the conversation of fervid and mystical pietists; from tear-stained diaries of sorrow and passion; from the manuscripts of young poets; and from the records of youthful taste commenting on old works of art,—we hope to draw

thoughts and feelings which being alive can impart life.

“And so with diligent hands and good intent we set down our *Dial* on the earth. We wish it may resemble that instrument in its celebrated happiness, that of measuring no hours but those of sunshine. Let it be one cheerful, rational voice amidst the din of mourners and polemics. Or to abide by our chosen image, let it be such a dial, not as the dead face of a clock,—hardly, even, such as the gnomon in a garden,—but rather such a Dial as is the Garden itself in whose leaves and flowers and fruits the suddenly awakened sleeper is instantly apprised, not what part of dead time, but what state of life and growth, is now arrived and arriving.”

In the group of chief contributors, a group that at this time formed an important part of Emerson's *milieu*, Alcott holds, perhaps, the most prominent place and presents, certainly, the most pictorial and peculiar figure. At the meetings of the Club he was among the members least inclined to silence. He had many thoughts and opinions in common with Emerson, but held them nebulously, and, unless he could have speech for his medium, he was practically helpless to convey them. Emerson pressed him to let go his fantastic yet curiously intelligent and far-sighted schemes for the education of the human race, and write, but when he did write not even so loyal a supporter as Emerson could find many of what he called the “anchylosed” pages good reading. Yet

with his friends Alcott seems to have had an almost irresistible charm. Mr. Woodbury's fine description of him at the high tide of his personal influence gives a certain reality to his place in Emerson's mind; so difficult to appreciate at the distance of more than half a century:

“Who that met him in the *conversazioni* which he made so popular can forget the experience; the master's ‘solar face’ framed in that wealth of hair in which the white breath of his soul had been caught and kept; his pleasant fervours; his irresistible hyperboles; his colours, dilatations, magniloquence, glorious soarings to the great might-have-been; sublime and ideal chimeras; the winning wilfulness with which he presented a sometimes erroneous philosophy; his pictures, delicate rather than distinct, and somewhat bleached as if conceived amid etiolated conditions; his fugitive answerings, orphic, subtle, like quicksilver, and even when merely amœbæan, the participants having dropped out, and the ground beneath sounding hollow to every ear but his, so surpassingly complete and master-like, always satisfying the questioner, who enjoyed if he could not acquiesce.”

Theodore Parker, to whose sturdy English and aggressive spirituality *The Dial* owed a large part of its meagre popularity, stood at the other end of the line from Alcott. A great student, acquiring with avidity, but failing somewhat in original discernment; a notable orator in the conventional sense of

the word, finding it easy to weep and to make others weep; an uncompromising moralist without the poetic apprehension of the source and significance of morals; his thundering virtue and his exuberant sentiment repelled Emerson as Alcott's vast idealism attracted him. Nevertheless, although he was never able to regard Parker with that rare and deep affection accorded to the few friends he received as intimates, Emerson analysed his character with justice and insight.

“His commanding merit as a reformer,” he wrote of him after his death, “is this, that he insisted beyond all men in pulpits that the essence of Christianity is practical morals. It is there for use or it is nothing; and if you combine it with sharp trading, or with ordinary city ambitions to gloss over municipal corruptions, or private intemperance, or successful fraud, or immoral politics, or unjust wars, or the cheating of Indians, or the robbery of frontier nations, or leaving your principles at home to follow on the high seas or in Europe a supple complaisance to tyrants,—it is a hypocrisy, and the truth is not in you, and no love of religious music or of dreams of Swedenborg, or praise of John Wesley, or of Jeremy Taylor, can save you from the Satan which you are.” No doubt the absence of æsthetic preoccupations and what Dr. Chadwick has called the “flat-footed, downright fashion of his mind” formed the most obvious barrier between Parker's intelligence and Emerson's, but beyond

these the "one fault" to which Emerson referred in the same memorial speech, the lack of measure, made a radical division. "He overestimated his friends—I may well say it—and sometimes vexed them with the importunity of his good opinion whilst they knew better the ebb which follows unfounded praise." It is significant that *The Dial's* most acceptable contributor from the popular point of view should have been one so little acceptable to Emerson, with precisely the reverse condition in the case of Alcott, a friend whom Emerson certainly did not underestimate, and who, according to Dr. Higginson, was by all odds the least popular of the writers for the new magazine. Between the two lay a body of talent decidedly above the average. George Ripley, who undertook the business management and was active in the organisation of the scheme, was Parker's close friend and sympathetic with his aims and ideas. He was a professional writer in more than one sense, the management of words as tools of expression coming easily to him. His criticisms are marked by the instinctive mental revision to which a writer may be born, but the secret of which can never be wholly imparted. He was characterised by Carlyle as "the Socinian minister, who left his pulpit in order to reform the world by cultivating onions," and it is quite possible that he will be longer known as the organiser of Brook Farm than as a writer.

His principal associate on *The Dial* was Margaret





Fuller, a remarkable member of the Transcendental circle, born some fifty years too early to come into the now ample reward of "women's work" in literature and scholarship. The wasteful New England of her youth and prime poured her unusual talents on the bare earth as David poured out the water brought at the peril of life from the well of Bethlehem. Her name is no longer interesting as a maker of literature, yet literature of a singular excellence she undoubtedly made. Mr. Higginson's sympathetic biography shows her temperament in the light of common day, and it is a temperament to reward study. By the side of Emerson, whom she ardently admired and dauntlessly criticised, she holds her own both in thought and feeling. Her unwillingness to confine her tastes and sympathies to the meagre best prescribed by him undoubtedly accounts in part for the dissipation of her energies. She had neither his severe capacity for ignoring what was away from his work, nor for deciding definitely what work was to be invariably and exclusively followed as the Path, the Way, of individual salvation. Sisterly sacrifices and the bearing of many burdens not her own persistently interfered with her intellectual purposes, and her editorship of *The Dial* is a conspicuous instance of her generous, but at times, certainly, excessive zeal. She could not bring absolute faith to the favourite Transcendental doctrine that being was better than doing. The contrast between the life of Socrates, the thinker, and that of Jesus who

preached in the field, plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath day, led her to question if it were not deeper and truer to live in action than in thought. Not less impatient than Emerson of futile and childish methods in reform her curiosity extended as his did not, to interrogation of the facts of ignorance and vice and misery. Her mysticism was worn as a garment merely, and the firm body of her intellect moved most freely when she threw off its entangling folds. If she was eager and theoretic she was also dispassionate and discriminating, and she insisted upon a decent background of scholarship for her literary performance. The picture of her solitary study in the Harvard College Library, the only woman who had up to that time ventured within its precincts for references necessary to the satisfactory accomplishment of a literary task, suggests the enterprise of spirit and her independence of judgment.

Her literary work, like that of George Eliot, began with translations from the German, and when she was twenty-five she thought of trying whether she had "the hand to paint as well as the eye to see." If "the wild gnomes" would but keep from her with their shackles of care for bread she thought she might write into fictitious shape what she knew of human nature, inspired thereto by the novels of George Sand. She never got so far, but the imagination that busies itself with these types of partly developed New England genius, pressed into strange

aspects by the restrictions on one side and the opportunities on the other of their environment, finds a certain reward in conjecturing the farthest flight her capabilities under more favouring conditions might have made. Not less typically womanly than Marian Evans, she was at once less simple and less pedantic, and while it is impossible to think of a *Middlemarch* as under any circumstances issuing from her pen, it must also be admitted that she seldom wrote anything so dull or so didactic as *Theophrastus Such*. The work she put into *The Dial* was most of it hastily prepared and represents only the crude idea unmellowed by revision. Read as a whole it is surprisingly sound and astute, however, and true to a high critical standard.

If Alcott may be said vaguely to stand for philosophy, Parker for practical morals, and Margaret Fuller for criticism, Henry Thoreau must represent science on its most engaging side. He brought to the magazine a continuous record of facts, delicately observed and poetically described. He was a loving reader of the best poetry of the past and was deeply saturated with the spirit of the Elizabethan period, but when he came to his own work he found it to lie not in libraries but in the woods. Like nearly all of his collaborators, he has given expression in his writings to sentiments and opinions identical with those held by Emerson. For example, in 1836, a year before the lecture on *The American Scholar* was delivered, we find him declaring that although

Americans had rejected the tea of Great Britain that country still supplied them with food for the mind, and that few American authors were content to write of the homely robin redbreast and the straggling rail-fences of their native land. His superficial resemblance to Emerson deepened the impression of his indebtedness to the influence of that dominating mind, but his passionate interrogation of the details of external nature led him into paths upon which Emerson declined to wander. He was that rare combination of naturalist and poet, an "outdoor man," with an inward glance at the soul. His was a classical temper united to the eye of an Indian. His skill of hand gave him superiority to "things" without the contempt for them so often expressed by the abstract thinker, so pungently expressed by Emerson himself in his memorable phrase: "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind."

Therefore, although it is said that Thoreau's mode of speaking and his intonation caught the trick of Emerson's so nearly that the two could hardly be separated in conversation, his mind did not catch the peculiar flavour of Emerson's but developed one unique and delectable, as different from that of others as wild fruit is from the cultivated.

With this cluster of talented young writers, all in their fourth decade except Thoreau who was only three and twenty, each different from the rest in all but earnestness and general direction of purpose, there was every reason to predict for *The Dial* a



HENRY D. THORNTON.
From a steel engraving.





brighter future than those most interested in it foresaw, and while their doubtful prognostications were sanctioned by the outcome, it is impossible to account for the failure of *The Dial* to command a public on the ground of uninteresting subject matter or a low literary standard.

When in 1882 it was proposed to issue a reprint of the magazine, George William Curtis wrote of it in the following eulogistic but discriminating strain :

“There had been nothing like it in this country, and if Schiller’s *Horen* may have aimed as high, there were not the same favouring circumstances, so that *The Dial* remains unique in periodical literature. Its purpose was the most varied expression of the best, the most cultivated, and the freest thought of the time, and was addressed to those only who were able to find ‘entertainment’ in such literature. There were no baits for popularity. In the modern familiar phrase, each number was a symposium of the most accomplished minds in the country . . . it is the memorial of an intellectual impulse which the national life has never lost.”

As such a memorial alone *The Dial* still deserves attention and certainly no recorder of Emerson’s individual effort can afford to ignore the picture it presents of his intellectual surroundings. The puzzle for the modern reader is to analyse the quality by which he was lifted out of them into permanence.

A month before its appearance *The Dial* could boast of but thirty subscribers, and upon this insecure

basis it was brought into the world with a fine disregard of consequences. Its first number was received by those who contributed to it in much the same spirit they had shown in forwarding the project. In place of the elation commonly attending the birth of a printed organ of cherished ideas—such elation as the young Preraphærites felt in contemplating the Germ, for example,—much dissatisfaction was expressed. Margaret Fuller wrote to Emerson, “I feel myself how far it is from the eaglet motion I wanted. I suffer in looking over it now.” Alcott complained in an Orphic outburst: “It measures not the meridian but the morning ray; the nations wait for the gnomon that shall mark the broad noon.” And Emerson wrote to Carlyle that it contained “scarce anything considerable or even visible.”

Yet it contained among other things Charles Emerson's *Notes from the Journal of a Scholar*, in which the family likeness existing among the minds of the Emersons is conspicuous, Thoreau's fine poem *Sympathy*, and Dwight's *Religion of Beauty* striking at the outset an Emersonian note: “The devout mind is a lover of nature. Where there is beauty it feels at home.” It also contained the first instalment of the *Orphic Sayings* by Mr. Alcott, which, according to Mr. Frothingham, were “an amazement to the uninitiated and an amusement to the profane,” but which Emerson himself pronounced the distinguishing feature of the new journal—as beyond all dispute they were! Except for the extraordinary rhetoric of

these, the general impression was of a literary magazine of a more than usually serious tone but without idiosyncrasy.

The second number counted among its notable articles Emerson's *Thoughts on Modern Literature* beginning with this characteristic passage :

“There is no better illustration of the laws by which the world is governed than Literature. There is no luck in it. It proceeds by Fate. Every Scripture proceeds out of a greater or less depth of thought, and this is the measure of its effect. The highest class of books are those which express the moral element ; the next, works of imagination ; and the next, works of science ;—all dealing in realities,—and what ought to be, what is, and what appears. These in proportion to the truth and beauty they involve remain ; the rest perish.”

Another article in the same number, *The Art of Life—The Scholar's Calling*, is attributed by Mr. Cooke to F. H. Hedge, but in spirit, if not in form, it bears Emerson's impress to such a degree as to deceive the unwary, as the following extracts will serve to demonstrate : “Of self-culture, as of all other things worth seeking, the price is a single devotion to that object,—a devotion which shall exclude all aims and ends that do not directly or indirectly tend to promote it. . . . Much that he has been accustomed to consider as most desirable, he will have to renounce. Much that other men esteem as highest and follow after as the grand reality, he will have

to forego. No emoluments must seduce him from the rigour of his devotion. No engagements beyond the merest necessities of life must interfere with his pursuit. A meagre economy must be his income. 'Spare fast that oft with the gods doth diet' must be his fare. The rusty coat must be his badge. Obscurity must be his distinction. . . . In self-culture lies the ground and condition of all culture. Not those who seem most earnest in promoting the culture of Society do most effectually promote it. We have reformers in abundance, but few who in the end, will be found to have aided essentially the cause of human improvement; either because they have failed to illustrate in themselves the benefits they wished to inculcate, or because there is a tendency in mankind to resist overt efforts to guide and control them. The silent influence of example, where no influence is intended is the true reformer."

For this number Emerson furnished a long review of *New Poetry* by William Ellery Channing, the first part of *Wood Notes*, a short poem *Silence*, and two or three notices of books of the month. Much of the remaining prose is so thoroughly saturated with the spirit which has come to be identified with him, as to seem to the casual reader the work of one pen and that pen Emerson's, not always at its best to be sure, but always announcing a consistent body of belief. One more extract, in this case from a *Letter to a Theological Student*, written by Mr. Ripley, to indicate the pervasiveness of the Emerson ideal:

“No man can preach well unless he coins his own flesh and blood, the living, palpitating fibre of his very heart, into the words which he utters from the pulpit. If he speaks what he has learned from others, what he finds in books, what he thinks it decorous and seemly that a man should say in his place, he may indeed be a good mechanic in the pulpit, he may help to hand down a worm-eaten stereotyped system of theology, to those who have no more heart for it than he has himself; but a true prophet of God, a man baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire he can never be.”

Even such fragmentary examples show how closely many of Emerson's associates were in sympathy with his opinions, and lead us to the one conclusion, that his opinions have outlasted theirs in influence because the fabric into which he wove them was so skilfully made, because his style, in short was so admirably adapted to his purpose and so artistically composed.

Yet even he did not escape the onslaught of the scoffers against the early numbers of the innocent *Dial*, and its more eccentric contributors were butts of unholy mirth from all directions, the *Orphic Sayings* opening a vein of dazzling promise to the toiling miners of the newspaper world and furnishing them with “copy” for continuous use. Mr. Higginson tells us that the serene philosopher showed himself worthy of his title by composedly collecting and labelling the worst parodies of his writings with the

precision and neatness characteristic of him and without apparent annoyance.

Possibly because the editor tried to avoid mishaps by bringing the magazine into harmony with more conventional tastes, the third number, although Emerson contributed three poems and three prose articles and Lowell a sonnet, showed a decided falling off in the quality of its contents. It was made forever memorable, however, by the appearance on its pages of Emerson's poem *The Sphinx*, in which his wise spiritual questionings leap into a form so spontaneous and vital, so individual and robust, so instinct with the force and charm of antique aspects of art, as to make us keenly realise the absence of æsthetic standards and interests in a public that did not instantly rise to the recognition of a new poet different in kind from any who had gone before. There was nothing feverish in the admirations of the Transcendentalists. The friends of Morris and Rossetti might be exulting at Oxford with strange capers over the discovery that "Topsy" was a "big poet" but *The Sphinx* found no reader to dance with aboriginal glee at the voice of the living Spirit. Yet the poem flashed and darted over the dull pages of *The Dial's* third number, as sportive in its genius as some creature of the woods abandoning itself to the joy of motion in unvisited solitudes. The images chosen present a picture purely the fruit of a powerful imagination. None of Thoreau's native birds and rustic fences enter into its composition. It carries

the reader into the vast desert where the drowsy Sphinx broods over her problem with creation gambolling about her. Why indeed should a poet trouble and divert his mind with Brook Farms and other systems of education, when his inner vision dwells on these enchanting phantoms of the mind:

Erect as a sunbeam
Upspringeth the palm
The elephant browses
Undaunted and calm;
In beautiful motion
The thrush plies his wings,
Kind leaves of his covert!
Your silence he sings.

The waves unashamed,
In difference sweet,
Play glad with the breezes,
Old playfellows meet.

The deep sense of mystery and wonder by which the poem is pervaded is reminiscent of no other poet. The grotesque shapes and curious conceits have in them no suggestion of artifice; they are the natural outcome of an imagination that sees symbolic pictures without the aid of external objects. One of the *Orphic Sayings* in the same number of *The Dial* with *The Sphinx* declares that "to apprehend a miracle, a man must first have wrought it; he knows only what he has lived and interprets facts in the light of his experience." In some prior existence, then, the quiet poet of Concord must have lived nomadic under the wide Egyptian heavens, working

the vastness and splendour of nature into his art with such angular forms as the Egyptian decorator used in painting his mummy cases, and regarding the elements as comrades of the desert places. The penultimate stanza of *The Sphinx* as it was printed in *The Dial* emphasises the extraordinary mood of exuberant fancy in which the poem was conceived, the third and fourth lines reading:

She hopped into the baby's eyes,
She hopped into the moon.

The revised version has gained inexpressibly in beauty, but has lost the artlessness that suggests the atmosphere of primeval myth in which the whole thought is enveloped. The monster, hopping from her lethargic dream to the child's eyes and to the lovely lady of the heavens, produces an effect of unearthly strangeness that haunts the mind like the miraculous detail of some ancient fairy story adjusted through slow ages to the apprehension of countless generations of credulous minds. What strikes one now in reading it is not that its philosophy is Eastern nor its expression of faith inspiring, or its mysticism unintelligible, but that its beauty is divine and indescribable, outside of rules and vivid with genius. After this shining achievement of the pure Transcendentalism which Emerson declared could nowhere exist, the fourth number of *The Dial* opened with an article on *The Unitarian Movement in New England*, of a rather dreary character. The pleasant humdrum sermonising of Dwight's *Ideals of*

Every-Day Life and a fantastic attempt on the part of Miss Fuller to depict her own soul as a person bearing the name of Leila offer but a moderate feast of reason, and not until Theodore Parker's *Honest Thoughts on Labour*, and Emerson's *Man, the Reformer*, published at the request of the Mechanic's Apprentice's Library Association before which it had been read, were reached did the reader find anything to cheer him. These two papers stamped the fourth number with distinction, but it was obviously declining in weight and interest and bade fair to justify Carlyle's verdict that it was "too spirit-like, æriform, auroraborealislike." The editor's difficulties were increasing instead of diminishing with time, and there was no prospect of financial success sufficient even to insure the modest salary she had hoped to draw from the profits. She was not yet ready, however, to confess the attempt a failure, and her second volume opens bravely with her own excellent paper on Goethe, and to the first number she also contributes another prose article and five book reviews, one of them a notice of Lowell's *A Year's Life*, which she finds "superficial, full of obvious cadences and obvious thoughts, but sweet, fluent, in a large style, and breathing the life of religious love." J. A. Saxton's *Prophecy—Transcendentalism — Progress*, occupying nearly forty pages, was perhaps a godsend to an editor anxious to fill space, but it hardly fulfilled the conditions announced to would-be contributors, that all articles

accepted must combine individuality of character with vigour and accuracy of style. How difficult to maintain this standard proved is shown by the fact that in the next number Miss Fuller herself was obliged to contribute eighty-six of its one hundred and thirty-five pages. Of the remaining forty-nine Emerson's work filled eighteen, and twelve were given up to Dr. Henry More's poem, *Cupid's Conflict*, sent by Mr. Alcott in place of the original contribution requested of him. It was obvious that *The Dial* could not long be continued under such conditions. It is amazing that two more numbers were produced before Miss Fuller sent to Emerson what he must long have been prepared to receive, the news that she was forced to give up the editorship. She wrote with dignity of her unrewarded labours and concluded:

"I think perhaps Mr. Parker would like to carry it on even under these circumstances. For him or for you it would be much easier than for me, for you have quiet homes and better health. Of course if you do carry it on, I should like to do anything I can to aid you."

Emerson finally, with much reluctance, consented to nurse *The Dial* back to life. He undertook to assume the editorship rather than have it "go into the hands that know not Joseph," and with his usual wisdom he declined to consider a partnership with Mr. Parker or Mr. Ripley, although he wrote to Carlyle, "Perhaps it is a great folly in me who have little adroitness in turning off work to assume this sure vexation."

To the last one of the numbers issued under Margaret Fuller's editorship Mr. Alcott contributed an article of his own which he called *Days from a Diary*. There had been some delay about publishing it, and when it appeared it was prefaced by a note from Alcott in which he makes this supremely candid admission :

“ *The Dial* prefers a style of thought and diction not mine, nor can I add to its popularity with its chosen readers. A fit organ for such as myself is not yet, but is to be. The times require a free speech, a wise humane, and brave sincerity, unlike all examples in literature, of which *The Dial* is but the precursor. A few years more will give us all we desire—the public all they ask.”

It would not have been strange had he looked with some confidence toward Emerson's editorship for this result although for one cause or another it happened that he himself had but one more contribution on the pages of *The Dial*. As a matter of fact the public asked for something quite different from what either he or Emerson desired, and the list of subscribers to *The Dial* never reached a total of three hundred names. Hereafter, however, the magazine maintained a standard little lower than the best in the line it followed. It was intimately related to the highest culture of the time in America, and the eight numbers of its last two years furnish a unique illustration of the kind of literature in which the jewel of Emerson's genius was set.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE DIAL (*Continued*).

EMERSON'S first number of *The Dial* shows that he was bending to his task with the same energetic efficiency displayed by him in conducting Carlyle's affairs. It opens with his introductory lecture on *The Times*, read at the Masonic Temple in Boston on December 2, 1841, and this was followed by Thoreau's *Natural History of Massachusetts*, with the following explanatory note:

“We were thinking how we might best celebrate the good deed which the State of Massachusetts has done in procuring the Scientific Survey of the Commonwealth, whose result is recorded in these volumes, when we found a near neighbour and friend of ours, dear also to the Muses, a native and an inhabitant of Concord, who readily undertook to give us such comments as he had made on these books, and better still, notes of his own conversation with nature in the woods and waters of this town. With all thankfulness we begged our friend to lay

down the oar and fishing-line, which none can handle better, and assume the pen, that Isaak Walton and White of Selborne might not want a successor, nor the fair meadows, to which we also have owed a home and the happiness of many years, their poet.

Editor of THE DIAL."

In this paper, Thoreau steps easily into his place as a writer on nature, the somewhat academic task of reviewing the records of the Scientific Survey interfering but little with his characteristic charm of style in natural description. What Emerson calls his "conversation with nature" lost none of its sprightliness by its connection with the facts and figures of the conscientious surveyor, and the delightful poetry of certain passages, that on spearing fish, for example, he never surpassed. It was the beginning, in America, of the kind of nature-writing which in late years has inundated the magazines, and in Thoreau's case it was the result of a creative imagination working upon the material that lay about him, which has not by any means been true of all his followers. His articles gave *The Dial* a freshness and an outdoor sweetness which without him it would have lacked, for not even Emerson would have been able to supply that peculiar element tending to such healthful repose of mind and simplicity of mood.

A very different but an almost equally interesting feature of the magazine under Emerson's management was the series of selections from the oldest ethical and religious writings of men, introduced by a paragraph,

the prophetic sound of which has already to a degree been justified by the course of study adopted by the modern theologian of the advanced school.

“Each nation has its bible, more or less pure ; none has yet been willing or able in a wise and devout spirit to collate its own with those of other nations, and, sinking the civil-historical and the ritual portions, to bring together the grand expressions of the moral sentiment in different ages and races, the rules for the guidance of life, the bursts of piety and of abandonment to the Invisible and Eternal,—a work inevitable sooner or later, and which we hope is to be done by religion and not by literature.”

The first extracts were taken from the *Amicable Instructions of Veeshnoo Sarma*, and the series was kept up to the end of the magazine, the selections being made by different persons from the Laws of Menu, the Sayings of Confucius, the Preachings of Buddha, the Desatir, the Chinese Four Books, and the Chaldean Oracles.

Of the forty-three articles and poems comprising Emerson's first number, he himself contributed fifteen, Margaret Fuller came loyally to his aid with a twenty-six-page review of the winter's entertainments, written with such acuteness and breadth of view as to make it still readable and suggestive after an interval of sixty years. It is amusing to find her arguing with all the force of her metropolitan taste against the Boston suspicion of theatrical performances, and contending that the lecture makes but a





cold and unpersuasive substitute for the acted drama. Her influence was ardently thrown on the side of what is still the "new movement" in the theatre-going world, and she urged those interested in the elevation of public taste to "form themselves into committees of direction for the theatre" instead of trying to put it down without anything to take its place more fully than Emerson's beloved Lyceum. The vivacious tone of this article, and the bright incisive description of Fourierism in Emerson's paper on that subject, together with his vivid paper on the Convention of the Friends of Universal Reform, gave the freshness to the magazine which the earlier numbers had lacked, and infused a gay sympathy with good purposes into its somewhat self-consciously virtuous point of view. To read and remember that neither editor nor contributors received a penny's worth of material reward for their efforts is to wonder at the sturdy quality of the edifice built on a foundation of pure disinterested faith in human nature. Yet the intimate human appeal which has been said to constitute the demand of the magazine audience was conspicuously absent. And this, no doubt, was the secret of the slow response to *The Dial's* merits on the part of even a Massachusetts public, in whom, as Margaret Fuller frankly complained, the intellectual qualities were developed out of all proportion to the emotional qualities. How pleasantly a plain picture of common human interests varies the most admirable idealism is seen in Emerson's sketch

Denounce who will. who will deny,
And pile the hills to scale the sky;
Let theist, atheist, pantheist,
Define and wrangle how they list,
Fierce conserver, fierce destroyer,—
But thou, joy-giver and enjoyer,
Unknowing war, unknowing crime,
Gentle Saadi, mind thy rhyme;
Heed not what the brawlers say,
Heed thou only Saadi's lay.

“ Let the great world bustle on,
With war and trade, with camp and town;
A thousand men shall dig and eat;
At forge and furnace thousands sweat;
And thousands sail the purple sea,
And give or take the stroke of war,
And crowd the market and bazaar;
Oft shall war end, and peace return,
And cities rise where cities burn,
Ere one man my hill shall climb,
Who can turn the golden rhyme.
Let them manage how they may,
Heed thou only Saadi's lay.”

The poet, then, should let questions of slavery and anti-slavery, temperance and intemperance, women's rights and women's wrongs, Socialism and despotism pass by him, while he minds his rhyme. How grateful Emerson would have been for the mental and moral liberty to follow such a course literally we know from the longing allusions to it, the continual counsel toward it, and the deep appreciation of it, scattered through his writings from the beginning to the end of his life. He detested the activity of practical reforms as heartily as William

Morris detested the active Socialism into which his conscience goaded him, and even the mild and passive *Dial* bustled on too busily for the tranquillity of mind in which he could work at ease. His judgment suggested for the magazine a different tone from that most suited to his own voice in personal utterance. He thought it ought to contain "the best advice on the topics of Government, Temperance, Abolition, Trade, and Domestic Life," and he debated whether it should not be "a degree nearer to the hodiernal facts" than his own writings were. Thus convinced he published articles on the Hollis Street Council, on English Reformers and American Reformers, on theologians and systems of theology, and only when he was clothed in the garment of his verse did he cry to the high heavens against the unimportance of all but poetry. In his prose writings, however, he adopted uniformly the poetic view, he looked for relations, and balance, and unity under variety, for harmony and rhythm and all the elements of beautiful design, and if he failed to find them, no amount of excellent intention could make a thing thoroughly right in his eyes. Note, for example, what he demands in his description of the ideal man in the paper on *The Conservative*. Here if anywhere one might look for partial and practical observation. But looking at the conservative, Emerson saw the whole intention of nature so fragmentarily carried out in the best of us, and, as always, he held this before us for our sane consideration, laying spe-





cial emphasis on the result of beauty obtained from the perfect adjustment of complementary parts:

“ And so, whilst we do not go beyond general statements, it may safely be affirmed of these two metaphysical antagonists (Conservatism and Reform) that each is a good half, but an imperfect whole. Each exposes the abuse of the other, but in a true society, in a true man both must combine. Nature does not give the crown of its approbation, namely Beauty, to any action or emblem or actor, but to one which combines both these elements; not to the rock which resists the waves from age to age, nor to the wave which lashes incessantly the rock, but the superior beauty is with the oak which stands with its hundred arms against the storms of a century and grows every year like a sapling; or the river which, ever flowing, yet is found in the same bed from age to age; or greatest of all, the man who has subsisted for years amid the changes of nature, yet has distanced himself so that when you remember what he was and see what he is, you say, What strides! What a disparity is here! ”

The third number of *The Dial's* third volume was edited, in Emerson's absence, by Thoreau, and it contains, beside the regular departments, about two thirds the number of contributions boasted by its predecessor, and none of them notable excepting Emerson's lecture on *The Transcendentalist* and Thoreau's translation of the *Prometheus Bound*.

The fourth number, opening with an elaborate

descriptive and critical paper on the work of Mr. Alcott, is marked by two contributions, each of unique value for the purposes of any magazine, Transcendental or otherwise. One is an article on George Keats, including the remarks of John Keats upon Milton as scribbled on a fly-leaf of Milton's works; the other a collection of "Observations" by Canova translated from Messerini's biography of him. In this number, also, is Emerson's fine paper on *Europe and European Books* — and the volume closes, not inappropriately, with the lines on friendship extracted from Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*. If the magazine under Emerson's guidance breathed one spirit more than another throughout its pages, it was the kindness of temper and friendliness of tone which marked Emerson's relations, private and public, with the world about him. He could quote with the best of grace Chaucer's scrupulous warning to friendly souls,

That there be non exceptioun
Through changing of intention;
That each help each other at her nede,
And wisely hele both word and dede,
True of meaning, devoid of slouth,
For wit is nought without trowth.

The fourth and last volume of *The Dial* opens with a long and elaborate discussion of the relative opportunities of men and women, by Margaret Fuller, written like most of the reformatory articles of *The Dial* in a moderate and uncontroversial spirit, without the slightest tendency toward the "screaming" which

Emerson felt to be inseparable from special pleading. In fact, among the writings of the present day on the "Woman Question" Miss Fuller's arguments would have the gentle sound of doves in quiet neighbourhoods, while the freedom she advocated was precisely that for which the most intelligent of her sex have laboured, the freedom to study and to use the opportunities offered by civilisation for the rounding of mind and character into symmetrical and ample forms. Her contribution, and the first part of a formidable review of *Social Tendencies*, by Charles Lane, left the number sufficiently equipped on the side of social questions, and the remainder of the articles consisted of poetry, essays, and literary reviews. Emerson's *Rhea* can hardly be compared with *The Sphinx* or *Saadi* for unalloyed poetic elements, yet in contrast with the verse that surrounds it there is no lack of glowing imagination in its lines despite their disillusioning theoretic suggestion. His essay on *Gifts* in the same number has been one of the most widely quoted of his writings, and his criticism on Carlyle is in the first order. Nothing, in its way, could be better than this picture of Carlyle's mind at work with its material:

"That morbid temperament has given to his rhetoric a somewhat bloated character, a luxury to many imaginative and learned persons, like a showery south wind with its sunbursts and rapid chasing of lights and glooms over the landscape, and yet its offensiveness to multitudes of reluctant lovers makes

us often wish some concession were possible on the part of the humourist. Yet it must not be forgotten that in all his fun of castanets, or playing of tunes with a whip-lash like some renowned charioteers,—in all this glad and needful venting of his redundant spirits,—he does yet ever and anon, as if catching the glance of one wise man in the crowd, quit his tempestuous key, and lance at him in clear level tone the very word, and then with new glee returns to his game. He is like a lover or an outlaw who wraps up his message in a serenade, which is nonsense to the sentinel but salvation to the ear for which it is meant. He does not dodge the question but gives sincerity where it is due.”

The following passage also must have struck oddly on the ear of the man who all his life fulminated against poetry and derided the æsthetic faculty :

“Carlyle is a poet who is altogether too burly in his frame and habit to submit to the limits of metre. Yet he is full of rhythm not only in the perpetual melody of his periods, but in the burdens, refrains, and grand returns of his sense and music. Whatever thought or motto has once appeared to him fraught with meaning, becomes an omen to him henceforward, and is sure to return with deeper tones and weightier import, now as promise, now as threat, now as confirmation, in gigantic reverberation, as if the hills, the horizon, and the next ages returned the sound.”

From the next number all discussion of social needs and problems was excluded with the exception of Charles Lane's continuation of *Social Tendencies* and his short article on *A Day with the Shakers*. In *A Winter Walk* Thoreau's typical mood is delicately, even exquisitely, expressed, and Emerson's essay on *The Comic* is ruddy with his finest humour, with that full-blooded delight in the vigorous exercise of the mind which he experienced in his best moments and which did not belong to his constitution. Writing in his journal of his lectures he complained of his inability to lay himself out utterly "large, enormous, prodigal," upon each. "Had I such energy that I could rally the lights and mights of sixty hours into twenty, I should hate myself less," he said, and he was right. Nobly conceived and effectively executed as all his finished product is, it is only at rare intervals, and chiefly in his poetry, that his mind seems to spring spontaneously to its task, poised and muscular and free from weariness, not only powerful but instinct with the consciousness of power. At these times he is on equal terms with the old great masters who went joyously from masterpiece to masterpiece without waiting for nature to renew her nervous forces. From a certain physical languor he needed time and repose and the psychological moment for his self-revelation. The lusty Greek within was imprisoned by the Yankee frailty of body and only occasionally could show his brilliant perfection. But the essay

on *The Comic* breathes hardy health and opulent enjoyment in every line. Where could one find a more enlightening glimpse of Emerson's mental attitude toward his environment of tense ethical effort than here :

“There is no joke so true and deep in actual life as when some pure idealist goes up and down among the institutions of society attended by a man who knows the world, and who, sympathising with the philosopher's scrutiny, sympathises also with the confusion and indignation of the detected skulking institutions. His perception of disparity, his eye wandering perpetually from the rule to the crooked lying thieving fact, makes the eyes run over with laughter.”

In this essay, too, as in so many others, we perceive Emerson's instantaneous grasp of the pictorial aspect of ideas, the plainer, no doubt, that here they are seen as caricature distinguished by a light facility. The intellect “compares incessantly the sublime idea with the bloated nothing which pretends to be it, and the sense of disproportion is comedy.” “Among the women in the street, you shall see one whose bonnet and dress are one thing, and the lady herself quite another, wearing withal an expression of meek submission to her bonnet and dress, and another whose dress obeys and heightens the expression of her form.” “No dignity, no learning, no force of character can make any stand against good wit. It is like ice on which no beauty of form, no majesty

of carriage can claim any immunity,—they must walk gingerly, according to the laws of ice, or down they must go, dignity and all.”

These passages and others like them suggest pictures to the mind, literally illustrate the thought, and this always is the case of Emerson in his spontaneous writing. Nor does he forget to remind the reader that the comic has its relation to his doctrine of unity. There was never a definition closer to the fact than this, so simple and so unendingly suggestive :

“The perpetual game of humour is to look with considerate good-nature at every object in existence, *aloof*, as a man might look at a mouse, comparing it with the eternal whole ; enjoying the figure which each self-satisfied particular creature cuts in the unrespecting All, and dismissing it with a benison. Separate any object, as a particular bodily man, a horse, a turnip, a flour-barrel, an umbrella, from the connection of things, and contemplate it alone, standing there in absolute nature, it becomes at once comic ; no useful, no respectable qualities can rescue it from the ludicrous.”

When we consider how constantly his mind dwelt upon the synthesis of nature as the one way to beauty, how he bent upon all relative objects the comprehensive gaze of the artist, how without guidance or inspiration other than came from his own instincts he followed virtue by the flowery path of æsthetic appreciation, we can only echo the

question of his *Ode of Beauty* which was printed next to his essay on *The Comic* :

Who gave thee, O Beauty !
The keys of this breast,
To thee who betrayed me
To be ruined or blest ?

and in the final couplet hear the cry of genius for the satisfaction of its need :

Dread Power, but dear ! if God thou be,
Unmake me quite, or give thyself to me !

The penultimate number of *The Dial* abjures almost entirely the intractable subject of reform and devotes itself to such purely literary subjects as the modern drama, the poetry of Homer, Ossian, Chaucer, and the translation of Dante. There is one article, by the faithful Charles Lane, on Brook Farm, such as might appear in any sober-minded magazine of the present day, but that is the only suggestion of iconoclastic influences shadowing *The Dial* from the body of reconstructive sentiment behind its sun-loving editor.

In the next number the long article on *Fourierism* by Elizabeth Peabody leads the reader deftly through the mazes of that interesting but complex theme, and a notice of the *Herald of Freedom*, an anti-slavery journal, by Thoreau, strikes a sharp note of defiance to those whose sympathies "the unpopular cause of freedom" had not reached. Emerson, also, in his address to *The Young American* called upon

that various individual to obey his heart and be the nobility of the land :

“ In every age of the world there has been a leading nation, one of a more generous sentiment, whose eminent citizens were willing to stand for the interests of general justice and humanity, at the risk of being called by the men of the moment, chimerical and fantastic. Which should be that nation but these States ? Which should lead that movement if not New England ? Who should lead the leaders, but the Young American.”

In the Centenary Edition of Emerson's works, Mr. Edward Emerson gives the instance of Charles Russell Lowell, “ one of the young men valued by Mr. Emerson and moved by his teaching,” as showing how young leaders of leaders triumphed in the cause of freedom by following the doctrines expressed in this essay, but that was still long in the future when *The Dial* closed its pages to its unremunerative public.

Emerson's last contribution to it was the poem called *The Visit*, commencing—

Askest, “ How long shalt thou stay ? ”
Devastator of the day !

and ending—

Speeding Saturn cannot halt ;
Linger,—thou shalt rue the fault :
If Love his moment overstay,
Hatred's swift repulsions play.

It is not impossible that the little *Dial* was approaching that moment of destiny. At all events Emerson could no longer reconcile himself to permitting such devastation of the day, too short for the business of his life, and with its sixteenth number *The Dial* went out of existence, singularly without honour in its own country, but the repository, nevertheless, of a few poems and essays which America must still consider the incomparable fruit of her sparsely strewn literature.





CHAPTER IX.

EMERSON ABROAD.

TOWARD the end of 1846, two years after the expiration of *The Dial*, Emerson received propositions from various quarters of England to lecture there, and after a number of months of indecision he set sail for Liverpool on the 5th of October, 1847. One of his reasons for seeking an English audience was to gain the criticism of a people less easily pleased than his countrymen and better equipped to call him to account. "In the acceptance that my papers find among my thoughtful countrymen in these days," he wrote in his candid journal, "I cannot help seeing how limited is their reading. If they read only the books that I do, they would not exaggerate so wildly." No more bracing sentence could have been found to sustain one's belief in his dedication to the best in his art.

He found an England no less ready than his America to listen to his words, and in London his audiences drew from the highest levels of the social and literary worlds. Thackeray heard him, and the ac-

complished Duke of Argyll, and Douglas Jerrold, and William and Mary Howitt, and others more and less notable for intellectual performance. His first course of lectures was given at the Manchester Athenæum, and the subject was *Representative Men*. He himself appeared to the English in the aspect of a representative man, and this country hardly could have had better fortune befall her than to be judged by his merits. During his stay, a letter in the London *Examiner* urged a repetition of his lectures at prices low enough to admit the poor. "I feel that it ought to be done," the writer says, "because Emerson is a phenomenon whose like is not in the world, and to miss him is to lose an important, an informing fact, out of the nineteenth century. . . . It seems also probable that a very large attendance of thoughtful men would be secured, and that Emerson's stirrup-cup would be a cheering and full one, sweet and ruddy with international charity." In the composite portrait we gain of him as he stood in alien halls facing an unaccustomed public, this sweet and ruddy charity is the feature most clearly indicated. We hear also of his somewhat monotonous delivery, of his slight American accent, of his trick of gently rocking his body while speaking, of his indifference to the effect produced upon his audience, of his oval Yankee face, "rather sallow and emaciated," and of his habit of gliding swiftly away the instant of finishing, without giving time for applause. Through the eyes of the Englishmen who attended his lectures we see

him tall and thin and very blue-eyed, with in his face a combination of intelligence and sweetness that disarmed those who, like Crabbe Robinson, were prejudiced against him. Clough found him "the quietest, plainest, unobtrusivest man possible," with looks and voice that gave "the impression of perfect intellectual cultivation, as completely as would any great scientific man in England — Faraday or Owen, for example,—more in their way, perhaps, than in that of Wordsworth or Carlyle." William Rossetti noted his "upright figure, clear-cut physiognomy, clear elocution, resolved self-possession"; and Goodwin Barmby acknowledged him to be the most beautifully simple and clearest-minded man he had ever met, though he deemed that he needed social sympathy and its gospel of self-sacrifice to make him a whole man. In general his English friends seem to have recognised in him nobility and sweetness and a certain pellucid quality of mind, together with a downright penetrating sincerity that won their respect. So far as they found him lacking it was in warmth of manner and richness of temperament—his Greek vitality not piercing to them through the sheath of his dry, impassive American presence.

On his side he peered about like an etherealised Diogenes looking not for a man but for a spirit. The spiritual quality in the English, the vein of sensitive imagination, of deep personal sentiment, was not revealed to him. He missed it even in Thackeray, of whose books he read but one, *Vanity Fair*, which

inspired him with the notion that the most moral of novelists had come to the conclusion that we must "renounce ideals and accept London."

Unquestionably the English heart could not be worn upon a sleeve for even so tender and faithful an observer as Emerson to contemplate. He pondered traits and customs, and generalised his impressions with marvellous acuteness, but they lack — as he said of Fourier's system — one thing, Life. The great towns, the famous people, the social phenomena were too much a spectacle for even his penetrating faculty to probe their appearances to the innermost reality, and his account of them, so interesting and so intelligent, so truly learned and broadly based on large truths, is lacking in the quality he himself would have been the first to miss in a similar report of America and her people. It is not, to use his quaint phraseology, the report of a lover.

In the hospitable English houses, over the generous tables, he met Macaulay, brilliant, arrogant, and voluble; Dickens, author of what he designated as the poor Pickwick stuff; Stephenson, the old engineer, whom he considered "in every way" the most remarkable man he had seen in England; De Quincey, then a "very gentle old man," refined, deliberate, poor and plain; Rogers, Hallam, Leigh Hunt, Helps, Clough, Arnold, Patmore, Barry Cornwall, and George Cruikshank. Coleridge and Wordsworth and Landor he had seen on his earlier visit. Tennyson he met at the house of Coventry Patmore, and

“was contented with him at once. . . . Quiet sluggish sense and thought, refined as all the English are, and good-humoured.” He visited beautiful Stafford House, and the event, which caused Carlyle “a certain internal amusement” at “such a conjunction of opposite stars,” drew from Emerson the remark that in the little visit “the two parts of Duchess and of Palace were well and truly played.” “One would so gladly forget,” he added, “that there was anything else in England than these golden chambers and the high and gentle people who walk in them!” He visited Oxford and had not a word to say of its grey and ancient beauty, but crowded his chapter with facts and statistics; and Winchester Cathedral impressed him chiefly by its dimensions.

A second visit to Wordsworth found the old man asleep on his sofa, and, unlike the earlier meeting, this one was marked by no original recitation of his poetry.

In all his wandering Emerson was shown the greatest consideration and esteem. “I am everywhere a guest,” he wrote home. “Never call me solitary or Ishmaelite again. I began here by refusing invitations to *stay* at private houses, but now I find an invitation in every town, and accept it, to be at home.” He wrote, too, that his admiration and his love of the English rose day by day though he withheld his sympathy. Carlyle greeted him with violent friendliness and welcome, sending a letter of invitation to house and hearth to be put in his hands

the moment he landed, and his sense of personal obligation to all his British hosts was so great that he earnestly charged his wife when a young Englishman visited them, to give him a fire in his bedroom and bread and wine before he went to bed, for if he were cold "it would chill my bones," he said, and if he were hungry it "would make me hungry all my life, they have been so careful of me."

It was precisely this consideration for material comfort, however, this practical talent for securing the essential elements of physical well-being, that made Emerson feel the difficulty of arriving at spiritual sources. Possibly he, so candid and ready to bestow his best upon his neighbour and to require the best in return, could not entirely realise the native shyness of the British temper in the presence of realities, the curious boyish reticence that keeps them from making of their own great woes or of their own great joys a little song. At all events it was with grateful warmth that he wrote of Clough and Froude, "the monks of Oxford," who showed him not only kindest attentions, but themselves. In the main, the "brave young British man" showed him only the convenient formulæ by which the secrets of heart and soul are most easily hidden:

"A horizon of brass of the diameter of his umbrella shuts down around his senses. Squalid contentment with conventions, satire at the names of philosophy and religion, parochial and shop-till politics and idolatry of usage, betray the ebb of life

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Ralph Waldo Emerson.

From a photograph by H. A. Smith, Boston.

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A horizon of brass of the diameter of his intellect shuts down around his senses. Squalid contentment with conventions, satire at the names of philosophy and religion, parochial and shop-till politics and idolatry of usage, betray the ebb of life





and spirit. As they trample on nationalities to reproduce London and Londoners in Europe and Asia, so they fear the hostility of ideas, of poetry, of religion,—ghosts which they cannot lay; and having attempted to domesticate and dress the Blessed Soul itself in English broadcloth and gaiters, they are tormented with fear that herein lurks a force that will sweep their system away. The artists say: ‘Nature puts them out’; the scholars have become unideal. They parry earnest speech with banter and levity; they laugh you down, or they change the subject. ‘The fact is,’ they say over their wine, ‘all that about liberty, and so forth, is gone by; it won’t do any longer.’ The practical and comfortable oppress them with inexorable claims, and the smallest fraction of power remains for heroism and poetry.”

Yet no doubt an opposite picture equally true might have been drawn of the English in Emerson’s time, of which he himself might have asked as did the British auditor concerning his discourse on Plato, what connection it all had with the subject, to receive the same answer: “None, my friend, save in God.” In fact, that same year, a young Transcendentalist was taking his Master’s Degree at the London University, whose subsequent picture of England was to abound in high imagination, transmuting into the most rich and glowing poetry the solid materialism of Lombard Street and the House of Lords.

If, however, Emerson failed to discern through

the shell of English formality,—through what he characterised as the “hard enamel” varnishing every part of the mature and finished Englishman,—the dreamy sensibility, the visionary faculty, protected by it, he at least took home with him no vain or shallow thought concerning the people or the institutions he had studied. Dr. Richard Garnett in his admirable biography says of *English Traits* :

“Emerson is so little concerned with the fashion of the day, and so much with the solid foundations of English life that his book should endure as long as these do. It should be a mirror for England to consult from time to time, and see whether, in gaining the more spiritual look which Emerson missed, her countenance has lost any of the frankness and resoluteness which he found.” Contemplative of deep truths and haunted by the vision of spiritual graces, he had, nevertheless, a sure and seeing eye for the externals of human nature, and his description of the new phenomena engaging his attention, although it was full of quiet humour, had not, as Dr. Garnett punctiliously affirms, a single sneer or touch of venom in its occasional sarcasm. He saw the English as brothers and as the descendants of the great race of men from whom he had drawn so much of inspiration and joy; he moved among them taking notes for his own instruction and for that of his fellow Americans to whom then it was a more or less rare thing to visit Europe; and in the process sincerely and wisely undertaken he learned much about the

national character that ordinarily is discovered, if at all, only after years, not weeks, of familiar intercourse. At times, too, with his eyes fixed on those annoying established forms the inflexibility of which was not softened for him by their lovely vesture of human associations, he caught the sign of a life deeper than any he saw and was reminded of a beauty interior and sacred which cant and simony and sanctimony could not obliterate from the national soul.

“But the religion of England,—is it the Established Church? no; is it the sects? no; they are only perpetuations of some private man’s dissent and are to the Established Church as cabs are to a coach, cheaper and more convenient, but really the same thing. Where dwells the religion? Tell me first where dwells electricity or motion or thought or gesture. They do not dwell or stay at all. Electricity cannot be made fast, mortared up, and ended, like London Monument or the Tower, so that you shall know where to find it, and keep it fixed, as the English do with their things, forevermore; it is passing, glancing, gesticular; it is a traveller, a newness, a surprise, a secret, which perplexes them and puts them out. Yet, if religion be the doing of all good, and for its sake the suffering of all evil, *souffrir de tout le monde, et ne faire souffrir personne*, that divine secret has existed in England from the days of Alfred to those of Romilly, of Clarkson and of Florence Nightingale, and in thousands who have no fame.”

It was a superb feat, from one point of view, for this home-keeping man, liking nothing so little as travel, to gather a traveller's harvest with such careful and skilful husbandry, and no reader of *English Traits* would guess the riddle of homesick mood and weary spirits that accounted for some of its lapses and omissions. He was oppressed by the sense of difference existing between the traditions of an Englishman and those of an American, and possibly, also, by the sense which he had gone out to seek of standing before a tribunal of high training and perfected culture. It followed naturally that in his private intercourse he was not quite the same as when in his own environment. Carlyle, who had come to dislike many of his opinions, spoke of his talent as "not quite as high" as he had expected. "We had immense talking with him here," he wrote, "but find that he did not give us much to chew the cud upon." Emerson's account of one of these occasions on which there was immense talking throws a certain light on the half part taken by him in the conversations. After visiting Stonehenge in company with Carlyle, he stopped at the house of Arthur Helps and spent there a rainy Sunday, which induced "much discourse."

"My friends asked whether there were any Americans—any with an American idea—any theory of the right future of that country? Thus challenged, I bethought myself neither of caucuses nor congress, neither of presidents nor of cabinet ministers, nor of

such as would make of America another Europe. I thought only of the simplest and purest minds; I said, 'Certainly yes;—but those who hold it are fanatics of a dream which I should hardly care to relate to your English ears, to which it might be only ridiculous,—and yet it is the only true.' So I opened the dogma of no-government and non-resistance, and anticipated the objections and the fun, and procured a kind of hearing for it. I said: 'It is true that I have never seen in any country a man of sufficient valour to stand for this truth, and yet it is plain to me that no less valour than this can command my respect.' "

It is plain to every one that from this doctrine the mind of Carlyle could indeed get little cud to chew upon, and later, on the way to Winchester, when his friends plied him with questions as to the American landscape and the American houses, his own house, for example, Emerson felt too keenly the lack of intimate acquaintance between the two countries to undertake description. "Men of genius," says Bagehot, "with the impulses of solitude, produce works of art whose words can be read and re-read and partially taken in by foreigners to whom they could never be uttered, the very thought of whose unsympathising faces would freeze them on the surface of the mind." To this extent Emerson was a foreigner in England, even with the friend of his heart, and he could not reveal the charm of his country to those who did not love her fair wild face.

"There, I thought, in America," he writes in his

book of records, "lies nature sleeping, overgrowing, almost conscious, too much by half for the man in the picture, and so giving a certain *tristesse*, like the rank vegetation of swamps and forests seen at night, steeped in dews and rains, which it loves; and on it man seems not able to make much impression. There, in that great sloven continent, in high Alleghany pastures, in the sea-wide, sky-skirted prairie, still sleeps and murmurs and hides the great mother, long since driven away from the trim hedgerows and over-cultivated garden of England. And, in England, I am quite too sensible of this. Every one is on his good behaviour and must be dressed for dinner at six. So I put off my friends with very inadequate details as best I could."

Thus Emerson's great personal charm and lovable presence fought against odds to win the affections of the English. Carlyle, in a letter to his sister, depicts him at one of the London dinners with "quantities of Lords, Townwits (Thackeray, &c.), and beautiful ladies," as keeping "very quiet, mild modest eyes, lips sealed together like a pair of pincers, and nobody minded him much." A writer in *Blackwood's Magazine*, who was present at one of these dinners, the one whither De Quincey was coerced by secret plotting, expresses his surprise that the American philosopher did not philosophise in public, but chatted of small things in a simple way. It was his instinctive resource in associating with persons whom he found "rich, plain, polite, proud, and admirable," who

nevertheless failed to appeal to his imagination. But he parted from them with warmth of feeling on both sides. He "had not been aware there was so much kindness in the world," he said. That he had made his impression on liberal hearts has been evidenced in many ways, and when tidings reached England that his house had been burned down, his friends in that country expressed their desire to join with his friends at home in helping to rebuild it.

Before he returned, he spent twenty-five days in Paris, which he liked better than London. He wrote home that he had all winter been admiring the English and disparaging the French and was then correcting his impressions. He liked the cleanly beauty of Paris, the gayety and good-humour of the crowds in the midst of revolution, the fire and fury of the people discussing social questions, and he found the universal good-breeding a "great convenience." It was June when he returned to England to finish his lectures there and take back with him to America "a contentedness with home" sufficient for the rest of his days.

He had given in England the very best of his developed thought. He had lectured on the Mind and Manners of the XIX. Century, on the Powers and Laws of Thought, the Relation of Intellect to Natural Science, the Tendencies and Duties of Men of Thought, on Politics and Socialism, on Poetry and Eloquence, Natural Aristocracy, Representative Men, and Domestic Life. It does not appear that his

audiences felt themselves specifically enlightened, though the more responsive felt themselves stimulated. His most captious reviewer found him "suggestive." But his influence was of the kind that gathers weight with time. Mr. Julian Hawthorne speaks of a Lord Mayor who wished to meet him because his essay on *Self-Reliance* had started him on the road to success, and of a Coroner of London who carried the *Essays* about with him through many years. These were isolated examples of an effect diffused through the unliterary as well as the literary regions of society, an effect which has grown in England as well as in America until, if Emerson could walk once more among us, we should find that only a small proportion of reading men of the present generation had escaped his direct or indirect influence. Matthew Arnold wrote sadly in his volume of the *Essays* :

"O monstrous, dead, unprofitable world!
That thou canst hear, and hearing, hold thy way.
A voice oracular hath pealed to-day,
To-day a hero's banner is unfurled.
Hast thou no lip for welcome?" So I said.
Man after man, the world smiled and passed by,
A smile of wistful incredulity,
As though one spake of noise unto the dead:
Scornful and strange and sorrowful, and full
Of bitter knowledge.

But the world is neither dead nor unprofitable, and it was one of Emerson's highest qualities that he consistently perceived its capacity for progress along

spiritual paths. As with individuals, he courteously assumed its interest in "starry wisdom" such as he offered it.

When he was once more in America, he naturally lectured at once upon England to an eager public, and, naturally too, considering the time and his comparatively untravelled audience, he put into his lectures much positive information and illustration of his impressions. They resembled family letters, in which it was taken for granted that the writer was speaking for intimates and not for criticism. After seven years the lectures were pruned and prepared for the Press, their general form and content remaining unchanged. It was then that the English knew how the quiet gentleman whom they had cordially honoured had regarded them, and it was to their credit as much as to Emerson's that they accepted in such good temper the salient, sincere, and not wholly adequate picture whose features they frankly recognised as belonging to the national countenance. Carlyle declared that *English Traits* was worth all the books ever written by New England upon the Old. "We do very well with it here," he added, "and the wise part of us *best*."

There was, however, one old man at Bath to whom *English Traits* was an occasion for characteristic and not entirely flattering utterance. In the first part of the book, Emerson had gone back three and twenty years to his first European journey. At that time he had gone down to visit Landor at his

Villa Gherardesca under his fig-trees on the southern slope of the Fiesolan hills, and had found him "noble and courteous, living in a cloud of pictures" and free from the "Achillean wrath," the "untamable petulance," which he had inferred from his books and from anecdotes about him. The conversation during that visit and a subsequent one is now widely known, as Emerson reported it. Landor admired Washington, declared that no great man ever had a son, unless it were Philip and Alexander, and Philip he called the greater man. In art he said that he loved the Greeks, and in sculpture them only. He preferred John of Bologna to Michael Angelo; in painting he preferred Raphael; and shared the growing taste for Perugino and the early masters. "The Greek histories he thought the only good; and after them Voltaire's. I could not make him praise Mackintosh, nor my more recent friends; Montaigne very cordially,—and Charron also, which seemed indiscriminating. He thought Degerando indebted to 'Lucas on Happiness'! and 'Lucas on Holiness'! He pestered me with Southey; but who is Southey? . . . He glorified Lord Chesterfield more than was necessary, and undervalued Burke, and undervalued Socrates; designated as three of the greatest of men, Washington, Phocion, and Timoleon,—much as our pomologists, in their lists, select the three or the six best pears 'for a small orchard';—and did not even omit to remark the similar termination of their names. . . . I had visited Professor

document is eloquent of his tremendous paradoxical personality. The passages most closely connected with Emerson's innocent mistakes exhibit his quintessential egoism, but were written, one may consistently believe, not in a spirit of petulance, but on behalf of that lovely truth so long worshipped in his art:

“MY DEAR SIR,

“Your *English Traits* have given me great pleasure; and they would have done so even if I had been treated by you with less favour. The short conversations we held at my Tuscan Villa were insufficient for an estimate of my character and opinions. A few of these, and only a few, of the least important, I may have modified since. Let me run briefly over them as I find them stated in your pages. Twenty-three years have not obliterated from my memory the traces of your visit, in company with that intelligent man and glorious sculptor, who was delegated to erect a statue in your capital to the tutelary genius of America. I share with him my enthusiastic love of ancient art; but I am no *exclusive*, as you seem to hint I am. In my hall at Fiesole there are two busts, if you remember, by two artists very unlike the ancients, and equally unlike each other: Donatello and Fiamingo; surveying them at a distance is the sorrowful countenance of Germanicus. Sculpture at the present day flourishes more than it ever did since the age of Pericles; and

Emerson's Study at Concord.
From a photograph by M. H. Brown.







America is not cast into the shade by Europe. I do prefer Giovanni da Bologna to Michael Angelo, who indeed in the conception is sublime, but often incorrect, and sometimes extravagant, both in sculpture and painting. I confess I have no relish for his prodigious *giblet pie* in the Capella Sistina, known throughout the world as his *Last Judgment*. Grand in architecture, he was no ordinary poet, no lukewarm patriot. Deplorable, that the inheritor of his house and name is so vile a sycophant that even the blast of Michael's trumpet could not rouse his abject soul.

"I am an admirer of Pietro Perugino, and more than an admirer of Raffaello; but I could never rank the *Madonna della Saggiola* among the higher of his works; I see no divinity in the child, and no such purity in the Virgin as he often expressed in her. I have given my opinion as freely on the *Transfiguration*. The cartoons are his noblest works; they place him as high as is Correggio in the Dome of Parma; nothing has been, or is likely to be, higher.

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"We will now walk a little way out of the gallery. Let me say, before we go farther, that I do not think 'the Greek historians the only good ones.' Davila, Machiavelli, Voltaire, Michelet, have afforded me much instruction and much delight. Gibbon is worthy of a name among the most enlightened and eloquent of the ancients. I find no fault in his

language; on the contrary, I find the most exact propriety. The grave, and somewhat austere, becomes the historian of the Roman Republic; the grand, and somewhat gorgeous, finds its proper place in the palace of Byzantium. Am I indifferent to the merits of our own historians? indifferent to the merits of him who balanced with equal hand Wellington and Napoleon? No; I glory in my countryman and friend. Is it certain that I am indiscriminating in my judgment on Charron? Never have I compared him with Montaigne; but there is much of wisdom, and, what is remarkable in the earlier French authors, much of sincerity in him.

“I am sorry to have ‘*pestered you with Southey*,’ and to have excited the inquiry, ‘*Who is Southey?*’ I will answer the question. Southey is the poet who has written the most imaginative poem of any in our own times, English or continental; such is the *Curse of Kehama*. Southey is the proseman who has written the purest prose; Southey is the critic the most cordial and the least invidious. Show me another, of any note, without captiousness, without arrogance, and without malignity.

“‘Slow rises worth by poverty deprest.’ But Southey raised it.

“Certainly you could not make me praise Mackintosh. What is there eminently to praise in him? Are there not twenty men and women at the present hour who excel him in style and genius? His reading was excessive: he had much capacity, less com-

prehensiveness and concentration. I know not who may be the 'others of your recent friends' whom you could not excite me to applaud. I am more addicted to praise than censure. We English are generally as fierce partisans in literary as in parliamentary elections, and we cheer or jostle a candidate of whom we know nothing. I have always kept clear of both quarters. I have votes in three counties, I believe I have in four, and never gave one. I would rather buy than solicit or canvass, but preferably neither. Nor am I less abstinent in the turbulent contest for literary honours. Among the many authors you have conversed with in England, did you find above a couple who spoke not ill of all the rest? Even the most liberal of them, they who concede the most, subtract at last the greater part of what they have conceded, together with somewhat beside. And this is done, forsooth, out of fairness, truthfulness, &c.

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"We now come to Carlyle, of whom you tell us 'he worships a man that will manifest any truth to him.' Would he have patience for the truth to be manifested? or would he accept it then? Certainly, the face of truth is very lovely, and we take especial care that it shall never lose it[s] charms by familiarity. He declares that 'Landor's principle is mere rebellion.'

"Quite the contrary is apparent and prominent

in many of my writings. I always was a Conservative; but I would eradicate any species of evil, political, moral, or religious, as soon as it springs up, with no reference to the blockheads who cry out, '*What would you substitute in its place?*' When I pluck up a dock or a thistle, do I ask any such a question? I have said plainly, more than once, and in many quarters, that I would not alter or greatly modify the English Constitution. I denounced at the time of its enactment the fallacy of the Reform Bill. And here I beg pardon for the word *fallacy*, instead of *humbug*, which entered into our phraseology with two other sister graces, *Sham* and *Pluck*. I applauded the admission of new peers; and I think it well that a large body of them should be hereditary. But it is worse than mere popery that we should be encumbered by a costly and heavy bench of cardinals under the title of Bishops, and that their revenues should exceed those in the Roman States. I would send a beadel after every Bishop who left his diocese, without the call of his Sovran, the head of the Church, for some peculiar and urgent purpose relating to it solely. I would surround the throne with splendour and magnificence, and grant as large a sum as a thousand pounds weekly for it with two palaces; no land but what should be rented. The highest of the nobility would be proud of service under it, without the pay of menials. I approve the expansion of our peerage; but never let its members, adscititious or older, think themselves the only nobility; else peradven-

ture some of them may be reminded that there are among us men whose ancestors stood in high places, and who did good service to the country, when theirs were cooped up within borough walls, or called on duty from the field as serfs and villains.

“Democracy, such as yours in America is my abhorrence. Republicanism far from it; but there are few nations capable of receiving, fewer of retaining, this pure and efficient form. Democracy is lax and disjointed; and whatever is loose wears out the machine.

.

“I never *glorified* Lord Chesterfield; yet he surely is among the best of our writers in regard to style, and appears to have formed Horace Walpole’s and Sterne’s, a style purely English. His letters were placed by Beresford, Archbishop of Tuam, in the hands of his daughters. This I remember to have been stated to me by his son. A polished courtier, and a virtuous prelate knew their value; and perhaps the neglect of them at the present day is one reason why a gentleman is almost as rare as a man of genius.

“I am not conscious that I underrate Burke: never have I placed any of his parliamentary contemporaries in the same rank with him. His language is brilliant, but not always elegant; which induced me once to attribute to him the *Letters of Junius*. I am now more inclined to General Lee as

author. Lord Nugent, an inquisitive and intelligent reader, told me he never could 'worm out the secret' from his uncle Mr. Thomas Grenville, who, he believed, knew it. Surely it is hardly worth the trouble of a single hour's research. We have better things weekly in the *Examiner*, and daily in the *Times*.

"I do not 'undervalue Socrates.' Being the cleverest of the Sophists, he turned the fraternity into ridicule; he eluded the grasp of his antagonist by anointing with the oil of quibble all that was tangible and prominent. To compare his philosophy (if indeed you can catch it) with the philosophy of Epicurus and Epictetus, whose systems meet, is insanity.

"I do not 'despise entomology.' I am ignorant of it; as indeed I am of almost all science.

"I love also flowers and plants; but I know less about them than is known by a beetle or a butterfly.

"I must have been misunderstood, or have been culpably inattentive if I said 'I knew not Herschell [*sic*] by name.' The father's I knew well, from his giving to a star the baptismal one of that pernicious madman who tore America from England, and who rubbed his hands when the despatches announced to him the battle of Bunker's Hill, in which he told his equerry that his soldiers had 'got well peppered.' Probably I had not then received in Italy the admirable writings of the great Herschell's greater son.

“Phocion, who excites as much of pity as of admiration, was excellent as a commander and as an orator, but was deficient and faulty as a politician. No Athenian had, for so long a period, rendered to his country so many and such great services. He should have died a short time earlier; he should have entered the temple with Demosthenes. On the whole, I greatly prefer this last consistent man, although he could not save his country like Epaminondas and like Washington.

“I make no complaint of what is stated in the following page, that ‘Landor is strangely undervalued in England.’ I have heard it before, but I have never taken the trouble to ascertain it. Here I find that I am ‘savagely attacked in the Reviews.’ Nothing more likely; I never see them; my acquaintances lie in a different and far distant quarter. Some honours have, however, been conferred on me in the literary world. Southey dedicated to me his *Kehama*; James his *Attila*; he and Dickens invited me to be godfather to their sons. Moreover, I think as many have offered me the flatteries of verse as ever were offered to any other one but Louis the Fourteenth.

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“Accept this memorial, which your name will render of less brief duration, of the esteem in which you are held by

“WALTER LANDOR.”

The qualities enumerated in Emerson's picture of the typical Englishman are many in number, and few of them appear to be the product of preliminary reading. His impressions, in the main certainly, seem to have been formed on the spot and singularly uninfluenced by the observations of others. On the side of merit he placed the logical temper of mind which he found in the Englishman, his resolution to see fair play, his self-respect, and above all his pluck; his affection and loyalty, his cleanliness and simplicity, his sincerity, his gravity, and good taste, his frank hospitality and his power of performance. On the other side went his inaccessibility to new ideas, his conceit, the "wooden prose" that rules his action, his tendency toward fixed forms and the sanction of tradition, his national arrogance and insular limitation, his suppression of the imagination and substitution of standards of comfort and utility for higher standards. Emerson in defining these traits used more than usually incisive characterisation and some of his phrases knock on the mind like the strokes of a hammer in a skilful hand: "The Englishman has accurate perceptions; takes hold of things by the right end, and there is no slipperiness in his grasp. . . . He must be treated with sincerity and reality; with muffins and not the promise of muffins." "If a bishop meets an intelligent gentleman and reads fatal interrogations in his eyes, he has no resource but to take wine with him." The Englishman "hides no defect of his form, features,

dress, connection, or birthplace, for he thinks every circumstance belonging to him comes recommended to you." "Nothing savage, nothing mean, resides in the English heart." "A saving stupidity masks and protects their perception, as the curtain of the eagle's eye." "To be king of their word is their pride." There may be difference of opinion as to the truth of these observations, but they are incontestably not trite. Occasionally the difference in "manners," never a negligible quantity with him, provoked him to a mild ferocity of complaint. The English, he says, "have no curiosity about foreigners, and answer any information you may volunteer with 'Oh! Oh!'" until the informant makes up his mind that they shall die in their ignorance, for any help he will offer." At the end of his book, however, Emerson printed the speech he made shortly after his arrival at Manchester, as sufficiently agreeing with the deliberate result of the acquaintance with England recorded on his foregoing pages. In the minds of experienced diners-out it holds its place as the most remarkable after-dinner speech in English annals. In it he dwells upon the two qualities that made England the dearest of countries to him after his own.

"That which lures a solitary American in the woods with the wish to see England," he says, "is the moral peculiarity of the Saxon race,—its commanding sense of right and wrong, the love and devotion to that,—this is the imperial trait, which arms them with the sceptre of the globe.

“It is this which lies at the foundation of that aristocratic character, which certainly wanders into strange vagaries, so that its origin is often lost sight of, but which, if it should lose this, would find itself paralysed; and in trade and in the mechanic’s shop gives that honesty in performance, that thoroughness and solidity of work which is a national characteristic. This conscience is one element, and the other is that loyal adhesion, that habit of friendship, that homage of man to man, running through all classes,—the electing of worthy persons to a certain fraternity, to acts of kindness and warm and stanch support, from year to year, from youth to age,—which is alike lovely and honourable to those who render and those who receive it; which stands in strong contrast with the superficial attachments of other races, their excessive courtesy and short-lived connection.”

It is this that we may as well accept as his most enduring mood toward England. It was the home of literature and morality to him, and what he chided was no more than Wordsworth and Arnold saw to chide, less than had inflamed the mind of Milton to vast expostulation.





CHAPTER X.

REPRESENTATIVE MEN.

UPON his return to America, Emerson carried his lectures into what was then the Far West, finding in the raw atmosphere of the newly civilised region ample contrast to the "over-cultivated garden" of England. In going from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh he spent two nights in the cars, and the third on the floor of a canal boat where the cushion allowed him for a bed was crossed at the knees, he said, by another tier of sleepers as long-limbed as he, "so that in the air was a wreath of legs." In Illinois he dwelt in cabins, and in Michigan rode in a buggy forty-eight miles to his lecture and twenty more after its delivery. He crossed the Mississippi in a rowboat with only a man and a boy for oarsmen, when much of the rowing was on the surface of fixed ice in default of running water, and he faced audiences that rose and walked out of the hall when he failed to interest them. They were made, however, of no stouter stuff than he, and his work gained force and body from his rough experience.

As in England he found much kindness, bringing much to meet it. He was at the height of his power, and his lectures on the *Conduct of Life* which were written at this time have a ring of decision and a firmness of texture, won no doubt from well-knit England and the positive West. He turned his own discomforts and the rough life with which he came into contact into cheerful arguments for their value. Such a passage as this must have fallen pleasantly on the ears of those who "drank the wild air's salubrity" west of the Mississippi:

"A Fifth Avenue landlord, a West End householder, is not the highest style of man; and though good hearts and sound minds are of no condition, yet he who is to be wise for many must not be protected. He must know the huts where poor men lie, and the chores which poor men do. The first-class minds, Æsop, Socrates, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Franklin, had the poor man's feeling and mortification. A rich man was never insulted in his life, but this man must be stung. A rich man was never in danger from cold or hunger or war or ruffians,—and you can see he was not from the moderation of his ideas. 'T is a fatal disadvantage to be cockered and eat too much cake. What tests of manhood could he stand? Take him out of his protections. He is a good bookkeeper, or he is a shrewd adviser in the insurance office; perhaps he could pass a college examination, and take his degrees; perhaps he can give wise counsel in a court of law. Now plant him down

among farmers, firemen, Indians, and emigrants. Set a dog on him; set a highwayman on him; try him with a course of mobs; send him to Kansas, to Pike's Peak, to Oregon; and if he have true faculty, this may be the element he wants, and he will come out of it with broader wisdom and manly power. Æsop, Saadi, Cervantes, Regnard, have been taken by corsairs, left for dead, sold for slaves, and knew the realities of human life."

From his European experience he deduced no moral for his countrymen except to stay at home. "I am not much of an advocate for travelling," he said, "and I observe that men run away to other countries because they are not good in their own, and run back to their own because they pass for nothing in the new places. . . . He that does not fill a place at home cannot abroad. He only goes there to hide his insignificance in a larger crowd. You do not think you will find anything there which you have not seen at home? The stuff of all countries is just the same. Do you suppose there is any country where they do not scald milk-pans, and swaddle the infants, and burn the brushwood, and broil the fish? What is true anywhere is true everywhere. And let him go where he will, he can only find so much beauty or worth as he carries." Admirable doctrine, had every man been an Emerson, yet even he had gained from mixing with a larger crowd. There is evidence in all his after-work of a tendency to stand firmer on the ground. The "mettle and

bottom" which he found in the English character was sufficiently present in his own, and henceforth was treated with more indulgence and given a more equal share with his idealism. His writing became more corporeal without losing its spiritual quality.

His immediate literary task upon his return from England was the collection of his separate addresses and *Nature* in one volume. In 1850 he published his lectures on *Representative Men*, in which he appears as a critic of literature and life in the definite and limited sense commonly given to the word.

It is a commonplace of popular opinion that a poet is not a good critic. In the presence of genius he is the best. With genius he can deal openly and directly. It is not necessary to "compare, compare," the essential thing is to comprehend with sympathy, to illumine and interpret. Intuitive criticism in the hands of a critic who is nothing more becomes a ridiculous affair. For a second-rate mind to cast aside the accumulated standards of centuries and trust to individual judgment for the placing of a talent invites laughter and contempt. Scientific criticism based on irksome study and careful measuring is the only refuge for the professional arbiter at work upon the comparatively mean product of ordinary intelligences. But, confronted with a masterpiece, all systems of criticism become in their turn somewhat ridiculous. The creative mind is summoned to construe the riddle of creation, and in the meeting

of original faculties one feels at least the stir of discovery, the tingling thrill of adventure in unexplored regions. Whatever results, it will be the uncommon, the unforeseen, the hidden, and the genuine, that is revealed by this calling of deep unto deep. Instead of the laborious effort of weakness and incapacity to reach the point of understanding, we have the easy movement of equal powers, keeping pace without difficulty or weariness.

“Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare,” says Emerson, adding “and even he can tell us nothing except to the Shakespeare in us, that is to our most apprehensive and sympathetic hour.” To consider the *Shakespeare* of Emerson, the most creative and imaginative of any of the seven essays on *Representative Men*, is to be instantly aware of a simplicity and humanity in the highest degree unusual, if not unprecedented, among the works of the multitudinous Shakespearean critics of two centuries. In no other instance has that complex splendour of performance been so inexorably reduced to the simple structure of a few fundamental properties. What audacity, for example, in attempting to realise Shakespeare by co-ordinating his characteristics with the aid of but one quotation from his works, and that the most abstract, indefinite, and mysterious he could readily have found:

What may this mean
That thou dead corse again in complete steel
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon?

Piercing through the compact body of poetry and drama to the personality whose relation to the work is the essential matter with him, Emerson draws a bold and beautiful outline of the great master, leaving us to debate the likeness and search out the sources of the impression. All his life a lover and student of Shakespeare, he gathered into a few pages the result of his meditation. It has been criticised as a singularly slight performance to spring from such extended preparation, and, truly, German critics and members of Shakespearean societies would find some difficulty in discovering what this extraordinary reader had done with his time. He had done what the modern sculptor Rodin would have done in his place. He had "possessed" his subject for the purpose of showing intensely and with absence of all negligible detail, its poetic interest. *Shakespeare, the Poet*, he calls his essay, and the poet only is hewn out for us from the bewildering exuberance of the material. And what is the effect? That we forget the unique character of the genius discussed and see it as one of the exalting possibilities of human life, as the demonstration that no performance is too divine or too singular to be emulated or surpassed; surely the most enchanting, the most consoling, the most uplifting conviction to enter the human heart.

The essay opens with the recognition of the debt genius owes to the past. "Every master has found his materials collected, and his power lay in his sympathy with his people and in his love of the mate-

rials he wrought in. What an economy of power! and what a compensation for the shortness of life! All is done to his hand. The world has brought him thus far on his way. The human race has gone out before him, sunk the hills, filled the hollows and bridged the rivers. Men, nations, poets, artisans, women, all have worked for him, and he enters into their labours. Choose any other thing, out of the line of tendency, out of the national feeling and history, and he would have all to do for himself, his powers would be expended in the first preparations. Great genial power, one would almost say, consists in not being original at all; in being altogether receptive; in letting the world do all, and suffering the spirit of the hour to pass unobstructed through the mind." Against this background, somewhat elaborated and filled in with statements not wholly accurate, of the literature from which Elizabethan writers through Chaucer derived, appears the figure of Shakespeare, massive, prodigious, yet mild and beautiful. The quality to which all more particular details are related is the lack of peculiarity and ostentation. "He has no discoverable egotism: the great he tells greatly, the small subordinately. He is wise without emphasis or assertion; he is strong, as nature is strong, who lifts the land into mountain slopes without effort and by the same rule as she floats a bubble in the air, and likes as well to do the one as the other. This makes that equality of power in farce, tragedy, narrative, and love songs; a merit so incessant

that each reader is incredulous of the perception of other readers." This is the key, the right key, of unliterary criticism. The attributes chosen are selected not for their literary but for their temperamental value, and suggest with subtle vagueness a pervading quality of temperament. At one with the best of the modern Shakespearean critics, Emerson finds Shakespeare's whole individuality incorporated in his writings. "What trait of his private mind has he hidden in his dramas?" he asks; and answers, "One can discern in his ample pictures of the gentleman and the king, what forms and humanities pleased him; his delight in troops of friends, in large hospitality, in cheerful giving. Let Timon, let Warwick, let Antonio the merchant answer for his great heart. So far from Shakespeare's being the least known, he is the one person, in all modern history, known to us. What point of morals, of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, has he not settled? What mystery has he not signified his knowledge of? What office, or function, or district of man's work has he not remembered? What king has he not taught state, as Talma taught Napoleon? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy? What lover has he not outloved? What sage has he not outseen? What gentleman has he not instructed in the rudeness of his behaviour?"

The imagination of the reader is obliged to assent to this unsupported description, strictly Emersonian

in its direct dealing with the results of careful thinking and its avoidance of all processes. In the pages following one quality is somewhat more precisely distinguished from another; the totality of impression in the sonnets, the carrying over of the meaning from line to line in the speeches of the plays are mentioned; the perfect transformation of experience into poetic expression is dwelt upon, and the sovereign cheerfulness of the "true bard" receives its ardent tribute; but there is nowhere anything to suggest formal criticism, based upon textual comment and analysis. Yet it is not emotional criticism either. The remark made by Dr. Holmes upon Emerson's literary judgments, that he holds the mirror up to his hero at just such an angle that we see his own face as well, is a clever statement of an obvious truth, but it conveys an impression of idiosyncrasy not entirely justified. In his Shakespeare, for example, we see not so much the face and expression of Emerson's own nature as the body of ideas from which his ideal was composed, and by which he tested all subjects that came under his observation. His individual yet classic standard was applied with consistent fidelity, and he escaped thus the danger of whimsical discrimination. That he attended to the larger relations of his subject and was chary of detail does not mean that he invented his descriptions to suit his predilections. If they are vague they are none the less founded on observation as acute and well considered as the most meticulous annotator could desire.

Indeed Dr. George Brandes, one of the latest and most learned of the Shakespearean "scholars," quotes "that keen observer, Emerson" as having drawn attention to the two entirely different rhythms used in Henry VIII., the one Shakespearean, the other much inferior. The passage is an excellent example of Emerson's efficiency when he sets his mind to the analysis of specific facts, and shows clear understanding of poetic distribution of stress, as indeed it should, Emerson in his finer poems exercising that art with rare skill. "In Henry VIII.," he says: "I think I see plainly the cropping out of the original rock on which his (Shakespeare's) own finer stratum was laid. The first play was written by a superior, thoughtful man with a vicious ear. I can mark his lines, and know well their cadence. See Wolsey's soliloquy, and the following scene with Cromwell, where instead of the metre of Shakespeare, whose secret is that the thought constructs the tune, so that reading for the sense will best bring out the rhythm, —here the lines are constructed on a given tune and the verse has even a trace of pulpit eloquence."

It is startling to find at the end of the essay an arraignment of the genius that saw the splendour of meaning in the visible world and was content to turn it into plays. Emerson also shares "the half-ness and imperfection of humanity," and the Puritan training that bred distaste for the theatre in even his beauty-loving mind led him to disdain forms of "public amusement" and to speak of the player



as a trifler. That Shakespeare was "a jovial actor and manager" was a fact that he could not marry to the magical poetry of the dramas. This touch of ascetic narrowness is the "concealed thing" limiting his appreciation, and preventing him from seeing quite as much of merit as "beseemed his work and spirit."

But the essay as a whole is an extraordinary example of persuasive and potent criticism. It drew from one of his most hostile English critics this spontaneous outburst of admiration:

"After all that has been written and said of the greatest of dramatists, there is a verdant freshness, a clear insight, a musical rhythm, a sympathy with the higher forms of poetry, in this lecture, which we cannot describe better than by saying as we do with unfeigned simplicity, that they have sufficed to render our admiration of Shakespeare's genius even more reverential than heretofore."

In the list of authors mentioned by Emerson which Dr. Holmes thought worth while to compile, Shakespeare's name leads the rest, having a hundred and twelve references to its credit. The next name on the list is that of Napoleon by the most surprising of juxtapositions. To read the essay at the beginning of which stands his name as "man of the world," is readily to perceive the fascination he held for the antipodal Emerson. His power to perform, to attain definite ends, to realise positive rewards, appealed to the practical nature upon which the

dreamer in Emerson took secure stand. As a man of the people, a representative of the common sense and common talent of humanity raised to its highest efficiency, like Shakespeare a hero in demonstrating the greatness to which anyone of us might rise did we follow out our possibilities to their furthest conclusion, as an efficient, prudent, vigorous intelligence, Napoleon called to Emerson's sympathy and admiration.

"Napoleon had been the first man in the world had his ends been purely public," is the sentence pronounced upon his achievement and defect. And as with Shakespeare the central quality is made clear to us. Shakespeare shone with matchless charm in the broad altruism of his interests. Napoleon burns his egotism on the mind, and is seen to fail by it as Shakespeare failed by his nobler characteristic. The latter showed himself indifferent to personal ambition even in spiritual causes, and escapes Emerson's sympathy at the point of declining to live personally on the plane of his vision. Napoleon had no vision beyond his personal welfare. The result was more grossly failure as the world is grosser than spirit, but less deeply felt by the critic discussing it. Emerson, in estimating Napoleon, was unhampered by the sense that he found most oppressive, the sense of possibilities unused. "It was not Bonaparte's fault," is his conclusion. "He did all that in him lay to live and thrive without moral principle. It was the nature of things, the eternal law of man

and of the world which baulked and ruined him ; and the result in a million experiments will be the same. Every experiment by multitudes or by individuals, that has a sensual and selfish aim, will fail. The pacific Fourier will be as inefficient as the pernicious Napoleon. As long as our civilisation is essentially one of property, of fences, of exclusiveness, it will be mocked by delusions. Our riches will leave us sick; there will be bitterness in our laughter, and our wine will burn our mouth. Only that good profits which we can taste with all doors open, and which serves all men."

It was characteristic of Emerson's occasional striving after a verbal effect that he gave to his paper on Napoleon a title certain to mislead the reader accustomed to take words at their current value and meaning. The distinction to his own mind was obviously clear, however. The worldly man, the man with temporal aims and practical methods, the man who lived by sight and not by faith, was to him the "man of the world," and Napoleon was these. He was also "the idol of common men" and the saviour politically of his class. Emerson's recognition of the fact that in spite of his later likings for the prizes of royalty he was thoroughly the representative of the industrious masses, of the laborious, ambitious, wealth-loving "rabble of the Faubourgs," and that his gifts are like theirs in all but degree, gives to the essay its ringing quality of sound metal. His theory was just and he hammered it out with the pleasure

of handling firm stuff. His phrases are sympathetic with the quality of his subject: "Bonaparte knew better than society; and moreover, knew that he knew better"; "Bonaparte relied on his own sense and did not care a bean for other people's"; "Napoleon understood his business. Here was a man who in each moment and emergency knew what to do next." In such plain straight speaking, Emerson seems to show his sympathy with the side of the Emperor that appealed to him always, apparently, with a sense of personal deficiency. "He is never weak and literary," he says, using the word as elsewhere he uses it with a suggestion of contempt, "but acts with the solidity and the precision of natural agents." The praise well fits Emerson's own performance at a time and in a society which welcomed his thoughts as their own, but which wasted the same thoughts by giving them a "weak and literary" form. However he may have fallen short of the robust vitality he admires in Napoleon and in Montaigne, that particular combination of adjectives could not have been applied at his worst moment.

Next to Napoleon on the list made by Dr. Holmes is Plato, "the Philosopher." None of Emerson's writings has been so roughly handled as this lecture, unexampled in individuality and freedom from accepted theory. The learned English critics found it also appallingly free from textual comment and from technical discussion of the Platonic system. A man of thought, certainly, but not of letters in the scho-

lastic sense of the word, pronouncing judgment upon Plato as a mere man, and insensitive to the minute significance of his philosophy was a phenomenon not to be taken seriously. It was not, however, as a scholar that Emerson approached Plato, but as an independent thinker with a tendency not unlike Plato's own toward blending the ideal and the actual. In reading the essay one asks what Carlyle can have meant by his complaint that the figure of Plato is vague and indefinite. Nothing could be less so. In place of the philosopher looking small and lost among his theories we see a man, a lecturer, polished, elegant, ironical, who has imbibed from the East its idea of Unity, of one Deity in which all things are absorbed, and from the civilisation of Europe the knowledge of variety and detail, a cool man, whose warrant and qualification to be the world's interpreter is a superb common sense. "He is a great average man; one who to the best thinking, adds a proportion and equality in his faculties, so that men see in him their own dreams and glimpses made available and made to pass for what they are." This is his representative quality and the one, the only one, Emerson cared to bring out. Whether he could have said more or not, whether he could have competed with dialecticians in the discussion of Plato's theories, is aside from the point. We know, of course, from our acquaintance with his mind that he could not, but what he did do was precisely what he wanted to do, he gave a picture

of the relation of a great mind to the universal mind of man. We know from his words the great ideas for which Plato stood and his distinction as a human being, not unimportant information to the small average man toward whom Emerson directed it. This passage shows how clearly he told his simple and impressive tale.

“In short, a balanced soul was born, perceptive of the two elements (unity and variety). It is as easy to be great as to be small. The reason why we do not at once believe in admirable souls is because they are not in our experience. In actual life they are so rare as to be incredible; but primarily there is not only no assumption against them, but the strongest presumption in favour of their appearance. But whether voices were heard in the sky, or not; whether his mother or his father dreamed that the infant man-child was the son of Apollo; whether a swarm of bees settled on his lips, or not; —a man who could see two sides of a thing was born. The wonderful synthesis so familiar in nature; the upper and the under side of the medal of Jove; the union of impossibilities, which reappears in every object; its real and its ideal power,—was now also transferred entire to the consciousness of a man.

“The balanced soul came. If he loved abstract truth he saved himself by propounding the most popular of all principles, the absolute good, which rules rulers, and judges the judge. If he made transcendental distinctions, he fortified himself by

drawing all his illustrations from sources disdained by orators and polite conversers; from mares and puppies; from pitchers and soup-ladles; from cooks and criers; the shops of potters, horse-doctors, butchers, and fishmongers. He cannot forgive in himself a partiality, but is resolved that the two poles of thought shall appear in his statement. His argument and his sentence are self-poised and spherical. The two poles appear; yes, and become two hands to grasp and appropriate their own."

Goethe, "the Writer," and the last of the "Representative Men," follows Plato in the list of those from whom Emerson quotes oftenest. His place at the end of the book suggests the esteem in which Emerson held him more truly than the number of quotations derived from him. He was the "law-giver of art," but "not an artist." His aim was culture, and "the idea of absolute, eternal truth, without reference to personal enlargement by it," in Emerson's eyes, is higher. He found Goethe incapable of a self-surrender to the moral sentiment and therefore less noble than poorer writers, but he did justice to his wisdom, and found his representative quality in his ability to cope with "the rolling miscellany of facts and sciences" characteristic of the nineteenth century. He would have been impossible at any earlier time and stands easily for this. For sane and skilful generalisation this lecture like the others is admirable, and Emerson in the course of it gives this interesting statement of what he

himself looks for in every writer; the gospel, that is, by which he is differentiated from his fellow men;

“Talent alone cannot make a writer. There must be a man behind the book; a personality which by birth and quality is pledged to the doctrines there set forth, and which exists to see and state things so and not otherwise; holding things because they are things. If he cannot rightly express himself to-day, the same things subsist and will open themselves to-morrow. There lies the burden on his mind,—the burden of truth to be declared,—more or less understood; and it constitutes his business and calling in the world to see those facts through and to make them known. What signifies that he trips and stammers; that his voice is harsh or hissing; that his methods or his tropes are inadequate? That message will find method and imagery, articulation and melody. Though he were dumb it would speak. If not,—if there be no such God’s world in the man,—what care we how adroit, how fluent, how brilliant he is?”

It was the message of Swedenborg that drew Emerson to him. His close study of natural phenomena and his exultant search for their source and cause inspired his sympathy, and his positive pronouncement on the side of pure goodness held his respect. For these reasons he devoted more than fifty pages to his qualities, setting him among his Representatives as the mystic. Quite as able as Plato to “see two sides of a thing,” however, he

balanced his merits with his defects. "There is no such problem for criticism as his theological writings," he says, "their merits are so commanding, yet such grave deductions must be made. Their immense and sandy diffuseness is like the prairie or the desert, and their incongruities are like the last delirium." The lecture on Swedenborg has been praised for its generosity and insight, but it lacks the joy of doing which is the happiest quality of most of Emerson's work. One reads with amused sympathy Dr. Edward Emerson's extract from the manuscript notes "I hold him responsible for every yawn of mine," and in one of the brilliant quatrains published in the volume of poems this humorous revenge is taken.

"A new commandment," said the smiling Muse,
"I give my darling son, Thou shalt not preach";
Luther, Fox, Behmen, Swedenborg, grew pale,
And, on the instant, rosier clouds upbore
Hafiz and Shakespeare with their shining choirs.

With Montaigne, the Sceptic, no such half-heartedness was shown. This warm and genial essayist, too coarse-grained for Carlyle, brought to Emerson the savour that he loved, the savour not of bookish retreats but of exhilarating outer world and healthy human nature enjoying it. He wrote in his journal, "With all my heart I embrace the grand old sloven. He pricks and stings the sense of virtue in me, the wild gentile stock I mean, for he has no

Grace." The high praise found for this graceless Spur in the lecture is that he is not literary. "I know not where the book that seems less written. It is the language of conversation transferred to a book. Cut these words and they would bleed." In Emerson's own essays how he strove for this result! How he heaped illustration upon illustration from real life, from common dooryard life, to avoid "literary" explanation and description! It is the one point at which his critics may venture to feel a certain pity that he did not wholly fulfil his aim, so bravely conceived and so nearly attained. The effort toward muscularity of phrase is obvious yet the red blood does not always flow in those swift stout sentences of Emerson's prose. Like Stevenson he loved best what was just beyond his physical capacity. But—as with Stevenson—the passion for strength and health and sane thinking lifted his delicate genius on sweeping wings and carried it out of the atmosphere of the dusty closet to where it could at least look down with sympathy upon the struggling, brawling world with which it fain would have mingled. The language of Montaigne gave Emerson the same pleasure that he felt "in listening to the necessary speech of men about their work, when any unusual circumstance gives momentary importance to the dialogue. For blacksmiths and teamsters do not trip in their speech; it is a shower of bullets. It is Cambridge men who correct themselves and begin again at every half sentence, and,

moreover, will pun, and refine too much, and swerve from the matter to the expression." It was thus that one Cambridge man lashed himself to his hesitating syllables, and, in passing, it is well to recall that his sharp scorn of ill-health, also, that has seemed to many a hardness of heart, had its origin in the pluck that rode down physical weakness and fought the enemy of a frail constitution. Again Stevenson is suggested and that unconsciously cruel reference by Mr. Archer to the "rosy-gilled, athletic æsthete" who was then declaring life happy from his sick room and finding that suffering could set a keen edge on what remained of the agreeable.

The lecture on Montaigne seems full of him, so clearly is the man of *Les Essais* brought before us in his lustiest mood. Yet the greater part of the text has to do with scepticism, and it is curious to find that Emerson's idea of the sceptic is the breadth of a continent away from the ordinary acceptance of the word. Who would not write himself a sceptic if he could be convinced of this persuasive definition. "This then is the right ground of scepticism,—this of consideration, of self-containing; not at all of unbelief; not at all of universal denying, nor of universal doubting,—doubting even that he doubts; least of all of scoffing and profligate jeering at all that is stable and good. These are no more his moods than those of religion and philosophy. He is the considerer, the prudent, taking in sail, counting stock, husbanding his means, believing that a man

has too many enemies than that he can afford to be his own foe; that we cannot give ourselves too many advantages in this unequal conflict, with powers so vast and unweariable ranged on one side, and this little conceited vulnerable popinjay that a man is, bobbing up and down into every danger on the other. It is a position taken up for better defence, as of more safety, and one that can be maintained; and it is one of more opportunity and range; as when we build a house, the rule is to set it not too high nor too low, under the wind but out of the dirt."

From Emerson's report of Representative Men we learn much of himself, as Dr. Holmes has said, and as will doubtless be said by others so long as he is the subject of discussion. But the final lesson to be learned from the indisputable fact is that Emerson himself represented most of the essential qualities for which he sought human types, "for the secrets of life are not shown except to sympathy and likeness."





CHAPTER XI.

POEMS.

EMERSON delayed until 1847 the first edition of his poems, "uncertain always," he wrote to his brother, whether he had "one true spark of that fire which burns in verse." It is not probable that to-day any critic of importance could be found to share his doubt. Whatever may be said of his prose there is one thing that must be said by all men of his poetry, that it is the expression of a poet. We may search for lines that do not scan, for endings that do not rhyme, for a metre that does not flow or march or sing, for dialect and colloquialism, intricacy of diction, and grammatical inversion. We may find any or all of these and we shall not have disturbed by a hair's breadth our inner knowledge that we have been pecking and quibbling over the loveliest product of our national life. "It is his greatest glory as a poet," Dr. Garnett wrote in his account of Emerson, "to have been the harbinger of distinctively American poetry to America." Possibly: but it is not our least glory as

a nation that thus early in our literature one poet could make our wilderness blossom like the rose, and we may hope that somewhere the blessed seed lies waiting for his successor, not yet within the field of vision.

We may well enough doubt, however, if Emerson's poetry is ever to be popular poetry. The American people would have fulfilled a high ideal of democracy indeed were that to come about. Every poem is charged with thought and thinking is not popular. But every poem also is an example of Emerson's own theory that poetry is "the perpetual endeavour to express the spirit of the thing," and it is the presence of the spirit, penetrating and informing the thought, that makes Emerson's poetry permanently buoyant. The intellectual element strong as it is in it is borne upward in the flight of powerful sentiment. At one time his essays, so pellucid in their crystallised illustrations, were considered recondite and abstruse, and at the same time his poetry was said to be filled with unintelligible expressions. The day of "popular science" has since arrived, and the popularisation of subjects formerly reserved for the learned is now so extended that one may go far to encounter readers in difficulty over Emerson's erudite allusions. One of his early public was heard not long ago to complain that the *Threnody*, beautiful though it was, contained passages of mysticism too complicated for his understanding. But one re-reading discovered the fact that while the noble and

tender emotion retained its power to fill the eyes with tears, the darkness had become light and not a line of obscurity interrupted the mood of exalted resignation induced by the poet's acquiescence in the harmony of natural laws.

It is then easily conceivable that to the larger number of educated men and women who read poetry, that of Emerson will be continually satisfying. It is inspired by the conviction that in no other way can truth be spoken, a conviction always potent to move sincere minds. And it is raised infinitely above prose by its delicate sensitiveness to suggestion in place of dogma. "God himself does not speak prose, but communicates with us by hints, omens, inference, and dark resemblances in objects lying all around us." Moreover it is essentially the voice of the age and country to which it belongs in its brevity and concentration. "Poetry teaches the enormous force of a few words, and in proportion to the inspiration checks loquacity." There indeed spoke the American, the man of all men to whom ennui is terrible, and diffuse sentiment ridiculous. If the soul is to be revealed there must be no long preamble to the overwhelming vision, and if we are not stirred beyond the possibility of expansive comment we have not seen. This terseness of description has, of course, its defect. It seldom conveys the sense of sweet leisure and the quiet influence of natural objects. In this stanza from *Saadi* its least fortunate aspect is shown, the

abruptness of the images having no special fitness to the subject:

Trees in groves,
Kine in droves,
In ocean sport the scaly herds,
Wedge-like cleave the air the birds,
To northern lakes fly wind-borne ducks,
Browse the mountain sheep in flocks,
Men consort in camp and town,
But the poet dwells alone.

There is, too, a certain harshness of measure in many of his poems to which our generation responds more readily than the previous one, no doubt, but which is too suggestive of conscious revolution against the insipid melody of much of the poetry of his own day.

The kingly bard
Must smite the chords rudely and hard,
As with hammer or with mace,

he announces in *Merlin*, and his intention to make "each word a poem," to fill each word with significance, has sometimes given his vocabulary an excess of substance which it takes all the free strong movement of his thought to carry. And it is true that he seldom used any but the simplest pattern in his constructions. Octosyllabic and decasyllabic lines satisfied his idea of "fit quantity of syllables" for the most part, and metrical intricacy had no charm for him. But to consider him there-

fore monotonous or unskilled in producing the effects of art is to judge him superficially. Many are his devices, when the ear is at the point of missing the prick of novelty, to seize its attention and renew its interest. Note, for example, how delightfully the slightly irregular jog-trot of the first stanza of the *Ode to Beauty* breaks in the second stanza into a pacing measure conveying the very essence of blithe emotion that maketh the heart glad without reason:

I drank at thy fountain
False waters of thirst;
Thou intimate stranger,
Thou latest and first!
Thy dangerous glances
Make women of men
New-born, we are melting
Into nature again.

Lavish, lavish promiser,
Nigh persuading gods to err!
Guest of million painted forms
Which in turn thy glory warms!
The frailest leaf, the mossy bark,
The acorn's cup, the rainbow's arc,
The swinging spider's silver line
The ruby of the drop of wine.

But it would be a difficult matter to analyse Emerson's prosody. He has at least the happy skill to dispose the stress in his lines where it will emphasise the meaning and he does this without regard to arbitrary rules. The result is sometimes rocky syllables that forbid the climbing voice its

progress. More often it is a mastery of simple resources and intelligent combination. In *Threnody* the ear of the dullest reader must be caught by the recurrent contrast between the mood of sorrowful but calm reflection and that of a sudden yielding to the sharp pang of grief, each reflected in the metrical movement:

The eager fate which carried thee
Took the largest part of me:
For this losing is true dying;
This is lordly man's down-lying,
This his slow but sure reclining,
Star by star his world resigning.

O child of paradise,
Boy who made dear his father's home,
In whose deep eyes
Men read the welfare of the times to come,
I am too much bereft.
The world dishonoured thou hast left.
O truth and nature's costly lie!
O trusted broken prophecy!
O richest fortune sourly crossed!
Born for the future, to the future lost.

Certain mannerisms occur in his poems sometimes as irritating defects, sometimes as quaint ornament suited to the individual style; and grammatical eccentricities are not lacking.

In the lines so often quoted by dismayed critics,—

The fiend that man harries
Is love of the best;

it is certainly open to the reader to place the accusa-

tive where he will, but these lines can hardly be called representative. Even where equally forced inversion occurs elsewhere the meaning is seldom obscured by it. Another peculiarity which gives an air of mediævalism disliked by exacting critics is the division into two syllables of the ending "ion" and similar endings. But there is nothing really fixed or formal in the poems to give the dialectic mind its opportunity. The description in *Merlin* of the true poet takes the precise outline of Emerson's muse :

Great is the art,
Great be the manners of the bard.
He shall not his brain encumber
With the coil of rhythm and number,
But, leaving rule and pale forethought,
He shall aye climb
For his rhyme.
"Pass in, pass in," the angels say,
"In to the upper doors,
Nor count compartments of the floors,
But mount to paradise
By the stairway of surprise."

Surprise is a characteristic element in the larger number of the poems. It piques the imagination and startles the indolent mind, suggesting old truths by fresh figures of speech and furnishing new points of view for poetic thinkers. This perhaps is to be expected in the work of a writer bent upon discarding outworn formulas and the conventions of prosy civilisations. What is remarkable is the extreme beauty of metaphor, paradox, and symbol. It is comparatively

easy to be unexpected and nothing is cheaper than the effect when gained merely by the use of unconventional material in language or thought. But beauty, as Emerson knew well, demands an integral idea beneath individual phrases, it demands the curve and balance of interior harmony, a structural expression pervading and accounting for all seeming eccentricity. This first essential was never out of his mind. All his varied rhetoric is chosen to emphasise the unity of man with God and with Nature. Against this noble background his most brilliant colours melt into harmony, his crudest forms appear majestic or at least organic. His unstained art, fresh and tonic with unflagging inspiration, has the merit he depicts in the May morning—

None can tell how sweet,
How virtuous, the morning air ;
Every accent vibrates well ;
Not alone the wood-bird's call,
Or shouting boys that chase their ball,
Pass the height of minstrel skill,
But the ploughman's thoughtless cry,
Lowling oxen, sheep that bleat,
And the joiner's hammer-beat,
Softened are above their will,
Take tone from groves they wandered through,
Or flutes which passing angels blew.
All grating discords melt,
No dissonant note is dealt,
And though thy voice be shrill
Like rasping file on steel,
Such is the temper of the air,
Echo waits with art and care,
And will the faults of song repair.

And even apart from this harmonising under-play of significance, even as dislocated fragments, many of his descriptive details are invested with penetrating interest. Salient characteristics of a scene or of a mental image flash across the understanding like the swift bright wings of tropical birds. Nothing could be more running over with the tumultuous gladness of an early springtime than this other stanza from *May-Day*—

Where shall we keep the holiday,
And duly greet the entering May?
Too strait and low our cottage doors,
And all unmeet our carpet floors;
Nor spacious court, nor monarch's hall,
Suffice to hold the festival.
Up and away! where haughty woods
Front the liberated floods:
We will climb the broad-backed hills,
Hear the uproar of their joy;
We will mark the leaps and gleams
Of the new-delivered streams,
And the murmuring rivers of sap
Mount in the pipes of the trees,
Giddy with day to the topmost spire,
Which for a spike of tender green
Bartered its powdery cap;
And the colours of joy in the bird,
And the love in its carol heard,
Frog and lizard in holiday coats,
And turtle brave in his golden spots;
While cheerful cries of crag and plain
Reply to the thunder of river and main.

What could better give the sense of wild, sensuous Nature making holiday than these "cheerful cries of

crag and plain" ? Emerson's care to preserve the key-note of joy in being led him frequently to choose epithets with the special aim of suggesting mirth and glee, riotous rejoicing on the part of tree, hill, or planet. The "sportive sun," the World-Soul with cheeks that "mantle with mirth," and Nature "game-some and good," "merry and manifold," laugh through his poems ; "The throbbing sea, the quaking earth, Yield sympathy and signs of mirth," the river is cheerful, the rills are gay, the mystic seasons dance, Love "laughs and on a lion rides," the Spring is merry, the rainbow smiles in showers, and the poet is "Blameless master of the games, King of sport that never shames." Seldom has any such body of verse been so gaily grave, so full at once of dignity and spontaneous joyousness, so eloquent of the spirit which he finds in his forests—

. . . sober on a fund of joy
The woods at heart are glad.

It is, no doubt, as the outcome of this rich delight in the healthy aspects of nature, that he so often personifies natural objects and brings them into his poetry as living, warm companions, speaking his familiar language, but, instead of sharing his mood, imposing their own mood, a quite different matter from the "pathetic fallacy." Nature herself frequently appears as a beautiful caressing goddess, shedding smiles and friendliness as she walks the earth among her children. What a free charm is in

this careless couplet of that chapter in the *Poems* headed by her name:

But Nature whistled with all her winds,
Did as she pleased and went her way!

And in this extraordinary little picture of man surveying the phenomena of experience and comforted by the lovely mother:

Little man, least of all,
Among the legs of his guardians tall,
Walked about with puzzled look.
Him by the hand dear Nature took,
Dearest Nature strong and kind,
Whispered, "Darling, never mind!
To-morrow they will wear another face,
The founder thou, these are thy race!"

Emerson's lighter poems not seldom reveal a childlike eagerness to learn the pleasant minor lessons of the outdoor world, and he is not his least poetic self when he is apostrophising the "burly dozing humble bee" or the blackberries of his pasture, "Ethiops sweet," but it is when he is making pictures or thinking in music that he rises to heights of poetic style. Nothing that he wrote combines excellent form with high feeling and beautiful imagery more satisfyingly than the austere and vivid lines on *Days* beginning:

Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.

This stanza of eleven lines is of an exquisite and noble loveliness which has hardly been surpassed in English verse, never in the verse of Emerson's immediate contemporaries and successors. Its mate in pictorial words, delicate reserve, and imaginative power is *The Rhodora* in which the simplicity of Emerson's deepest thought smiles frankly in our faces from his blossoming New England solitudes. These two poems are types of his truest inspiration, embodying as they do his fervent sense of moral responsibility and his bright freedom from didactic moralising. It was while he strolled musing near the haunts of his fair Rhodora that he attained the curious spiritual passion or ecstasy to which at certain moments Nature inspired him; the upspringing of these central fires of feeling which he thanks the God Pan for keeping in control:

Haply else we could not live,
Life would be too wild an ode.

At these moments his pure-minded Bacchus pours "the remembering wine" and fulfils his prayer that he

Refresh the faded tints,
Recut the aged prints,
And write my old adventures with the pen
Which on the first day drew
Upon the tablets blue,
The dancing Pleiads and eternal men.

At these moments he is more the poet of energy, to adopt Matthew Arnold's phraseology, than Words-

worth in his most soaring flight, than Arnold himself at any instant. Mr. Brownell, Arnold's most discerning critic, has said of the latter that he is the poet *par excellence* of feeling that is legitimated by the tribunal of reason, and he finds his poetry "admirably representative of the combined thought and feeling of the era." "But," he adds of his genius, "it is a reflective and philosophic genius, and accordingly its sincerest poetical expression savours a little of statement rather than of song." It is the opposite of this quality in Emerson's most rapturous poems that presses home the conviction of his essentially poetic genius despite flaw and limitation. Reason is not to him a faculty by which imagination is restrained or crippled; it is the ether in which float all consoling and radiant thoughts, flowing into the human mind from the region of perfect bliss, adorable as religion is adorable to such a worshipper as Vaughan.

Mr. Brownell finds in Arnold's treatment of the theme of immortality that "imaginative reason" which operates with an eloquence in which we can acquiesce because it makes no claim in the region of the unverifiable "which reason would not, in recognising its own limits, acquiesce in as properly within the jurisdiction of the imagination," and in reading his poetry, therefore, we have not to say to ourselves "But it is not true!" Emerson's treatment of the same theme is less cautious, but not, I think, less poetic. In this passage from the *Threnody*,

although in some of its lines the rush of feeling is interrupted by complicated and infelicitous expression, as nearly artificial as Emerson's always significant expression can become, its substance has pure poetic value and the emotion evoked by unalterable law is of the highest intensity. If it is faith it is not blind faith. If it is reason it is not passionless. If it is not poetry it is nothing:

Fair the soul's recess and shrine,
 Magic-built to last a season;
 Masterpiece of love benign,
 Fairer that expansive reason
 Whose omen 't is, and sign.
 Wilt thou not ope thy heart to know
 What rainbows teach, and sunsets show?
 Verdict which accumulates
 From lengthening scroll of human fates,
 Voice of earth to earth returned,
 Prayers of saints that inly burned,—
 Saying, *what is excellent,*
As God lives, is permanent;
Hearts are dust, Hearts' loves remain;
Heart's love will meet thee again.
 Revere the Maker; fetch thine eye
 Up to his style and manners of the sky.
 Not of adamant and gold
 Built he heaven stark and cold;
 No, but a nest of bending reeds,
 Flowering grass and scented weeds;
 Or like a traveller's fleeing tent,
 Or bow above the tempest bent;
 Built of tears and sacred flames,
 And virtue reaching to its aims;
 Built of furtherance and pursuing,
 Not of spent deeds, but of doing.
 Silent rushes the swift Lord

Through ruined systems still restored,
Broadsowing, bleak and void to bless,
Plants with worlds the wilderness;
Waters with tears of ancient sorrow
Apples of Eden ripe to-morrow.
House and tenant go to ground,
Lost in God, in Godhead found.

Arnold found Wordsworth's superiority in the fact that he dealt with more of life than Burns or Keats or Heine, and dealt with life as a whole more powerfully. If this is true of Wordsworth, as indisputably it is, it is true of Emerson who equally with Wordsworth pursued one object, to "attain inward freedom, serenity, happiness, contentment." Those who have found his poetry fragmentary can hardly have felt in it this moral unity. Already he has his expositors, from whom we learn that his *Brahma* for example, sums up the burden of the Bhagavad's philosophy, and that his reference to the wheel "on which all beings ride" has its origin in the Rig Veda of the Hindoos, and that "the starred eternal worm" may be identified with the stupendous serpent-god of the Hindoos, and we are told how much of his philosophy he has drawn from the East and how much his poetry is steeped in Eastern feeling, but all this seems very far aside from his real poetic achievement. His real poetic achievement lies outside of his borrowings from Eastern religions although this borrowing was characteristically the outcome of his truly poetic desire to unite the deep thought of the world. His real poetic achievement has its source

in his power to penetrate the shows of things and reveal their essence. We cannot ignore his poetry because like that of Wordsworth it deals with reality, with the most real of all realities, the indestructible soul of man. If "how to live" is indeed, as Arnold has said, the important teaching of the greatest poets, and if no more than this is needed, we may class Emerson among them without fear, for if we do not learn from his poetry so far as may be learned from any exterior teaching, how to maintain within ourselves the strength of hope and serene intelligent trust and indomitable moral purpose, we are incapable of feeling the "balm of thoughtful words."





CHAPTER XII.

THE CLOSING YEARS.

ALTHOUGH Emerson lived to be nearly seventy-nine years old, the greater part of the significant work of his life was accomplished before he had completed his sixth decade. The rising tide of anti-slavery sentiment and the pressure of political and national questions somewhat changed the current of his thought between 1850 and 1865. Detached as he kept himself from partisan issues, he was not one who could study his Greek without allowing the news of the firing on Fort Sumter to disturb him. After the war had begun he found that powder "smelt good" to him, but he kept constantly on the side of moderation in judgment, and realised, as few Northerners at that time seem to have done, the deplorable condition of the South. In one of his lectures on slavery in 1855 he urges the ending of the dangerous dispute on "some ground of fair compensation on one side and of satisfaction on the other to the conscience of the Free States." "It is really the great task fit for this

country to accomplish," he says, "to buy that property of the planters, as the British nation bought the West Indian slaves. I say buy,—never conceding the right of the planter to own, but that we may acknowledge the calamity of his position, and bear a countryman's share in relieving him; and because it is the only practicable course and is innocent. Here is a right social or public function, which one man cannot do, which all men must do. 'Tis said it will cost two thousand millions of dollars. Was there ever any contribution that was so enthusiastically paid as this will be? We will have a chimney-tax. We will give up our coaches, and wine, and watches. The churches will melt their plate. The Father of his Country shall wait, well pleased, a little longer for his monument; Franklin for his; the Pilgrim Fathers for theirs; and the patient Columbus for his. The mechanics will give; the needle-women will give; the children will have cent-societies. Every man in the land will give a week's work to dig away this accursed mountain of sorrow once and for ever out of the world." Could this plan have been followed it is now obvious how economical it would have been, not merely in lives but in dollars, for a country left by the Civil War with a bonded debt of nearly three billions, to say nothing of the blighting legal-tender notes. Most of his suggestions, founded as they were upon permanent principles of wisdom, carried a certain practical weight with which the "mystic" is seldom accredited, but which not infrequently is

justly his due. In January, 1862, eight months before the Emancipation Proclamation, Emerson was clear that emancipation was the demand of civilisation, and with much acuteness he compared the issue of slavery with other issues, some of which are still in dispute.

“It is like free trade,” he said,—“certainly the interest of nations, but by no means the interest of certain towns and districts, which tariff feeds fat, and the eager interest of the few overpowers the apathetic general conviction of the many. Bank-notes rob the public, but are such a daily convenience that we silence our scruples and make believe they are gold. So imposts are the cheap and right taxation, but by the dislike of the people to pay out a direct tax, governments are forced to render life costly by making them pay twice as much, hidden in the price of tea and sugar.” In the course of the same lecture, after defining the Emancipation policy in the form which he considered most desirable, he thus defines also his idea of government, in which his optimism shows its substantial quality: “I hope it is not a fatal objection to this policy that it is simple and beneficent thoroughly, which is the attribute of a moral action. An unprecedented material prosperity has not tended to make us stoics or Christians. But the laws by which the universe is organised reappear at every point, and will rule it. The end of all political struggle is to establish morality as the basis of all legislation. It is not free institutions, it is not a

republic, it is not a democracy that is the end,—no, but only the means. Morality is the object of government. We want a state of things in which crime shall not pay. This is the consolation on which we rest in the darkness of the future and the afflictions of to-day, that the government of the world is moral, and does for ever destroy what is not.” Upon a Sunday shortly following the Emancipation Proclamation, he read an address, to the eloquence of which one of its auditors has borne ardent testimony:

“I have heard Sumner and Phillips and Lincoln and Gladstone,” he says, “and other famous orators, but never from other lips words so impressively spoken as concluding that address: ‘Do not let the dying die. Hold them back to this world until you have charged their ear and heart with this message to other spiritual societies announcing the melioration of our planet!’ ”¹

Not only in the stress of great national emergencies was Emerson a good citizen. He was scrupulous in his observance of a citizen’s duties, and although he did not like working in associations, he was very willing to do what he judged his fair part of such public service. In 1863 he was appointed one of the visitors to the Military Academy at West Point, and Mr. Cabot quotes from a letter written by Mr. John Burroughs a delightful description of him, all eagerness and attention where the rest of the Board looked dull or fatigued or peremptory, and wearing much the appearance of “an eager, alert, inquisitive

¹ J. W. Chadwick.

farmer." He could hardly be described as a "club man" in the modern sense of the word, yet, according to Dr. Holmes, he was the nucleus of the Saturday Club in Boston and was very regular in his attendance at its meetings, continuing to dine at its table until within a year or two of his death. In one chapter of the volume entitled *Society and Solitude*, which he published in 1870, he gives an admirable picture of the uses and pleasures of a club from a point of view far from "transcendental" in the familiar acceptance of that long-suffering word. The club is to bring people together who wish to exchange thoughts and experiences, but it must be self-protecting, and obstacles arise at the outset. "There are people who cannot well be cultivated, whom you must keep down and quiet if you can. There are those who have the instinct of a bat to fly against any lighted candle and put it out, — marplots and contradictors. There are those who go only to talk, and those who go only to hear: both are bad. A right rule for a club would be, — Admit no man whose presence excludes any one topic. It requires people who are not surprised and shocked, who do and let do and let be, who sink trifles and know solid values, and who take a great deal for granted." There must not be too strong a tendency toward the superfine. There must be room for a large range of experience. "I knew a scholar, of some experience in camps, who said that he liked, in a barroom, to tell a few coon stories and put himself on a good footing

with the company; then he could be as silent as he chose. A scholar does not wish always to be pumping his brains; he wants gossips. The blackcoats are good company only for blackcoats; but when the manufacturers, merchants, and shipmasters meet, see how much they have to say, and how long the conversation lasts! They have come from many zones; they have traversed wide countries; they know each his own arts and the cunning artisans of his craft; they have seen the best and the worst of men. Their knowledge contradicts the popular opinion and your own on many points. Things which you fancy wrong they know to be right and profitable; things which you reckon superstitious they know to be true. They have found virtue in the strangest homes; and in the rich store of their adventures are instances which you have been seeking in vain for years and which they suddenly and unwittingly offer you." Here, again, is the instinctive repulsion to the "scholar" and "literary" man; and also the receptive attitude characteristic of Emerson in his intercourse with the active world as it was reproduced in the little society around him. "My father delighted in town-meetings," his son records, "and sat there humbly as an admiring learner, while the farmer, the shoemaker, and the squire made all that he delighted to read of Demosthenes, of Cato, of Burke, as true in Concord as in ancient cities." As an admiring learner he was prone to sit humbly among all his fellow-men and absorb lessons which he gave out again in-

vested with the magic of his significant phrase. He became, however, increasingly indisposed to "pump his brains" for new combinations of thought, and between 1860 and 1870 produced little that was equal to his best, or that was altogether the fresh product of his mind, although he went on making up lectures from material already collected, and diligently delivering them to meet the common necessities of his life, the war having sapped his resources. To this period, nevertheless, belong the beautiful *May-Day*, and *Terminus*, which he read, smiling, to his son, apparently in full vigour of health, but conscious of the inner monition of flagging faculties:

It is time to be old,
To take in sail: —
The god of bounds,
Who sets to seas a shore,
Came to me in his fatal rounds,
And said: "No more!"

Strange and sad it is to trace in the work of these later days the immitigable resolution of time that the gentle scholar should now "contract his firmament." In 1870 he was asked, to his delight, to give a course of University lectures at Cambridge for the benefit of advanced students. He saw here the fitting time and place for a course of lectures on *The Natural History of the Intellect*, a subject that continually had called to him since his young-manhood. He would now, he thought, gather up the fragments of observation which he had been for many years preserving

in notes, give them a consecutive form, and expand them to cover the range of his long meditation, but he was no longer mentally equal to the effort. After the first lecture he came home quoting, "I have joined the dim choir of the bards who have been," and though he finished the course in good heart, it is impossible not to surmise that he was well aware of its failure to express his early purpose. His prophetic lines were promptly realised. He was now obliged to "economise the failing river," and touchingly to follow out his counsel—

A little while
Still plan and smile,
And, fault of novel germs,
Mature the fallen fruit.

Before he was sixty he had written, in a spirit of gay philosophy, upon *Old Age*, bent upon discovering its compensations, but nothing that he said then portrayed the extreme beauty of his quiet obedience to the natural law for which no personal deprivation could lessen his reverence.

In 1871 he took, with a party of friends, a trip to California, and out of the account of it, published by one of his companions, his sturdy unreadiness to benefit by the consideration of others shines conspicuously. The year after his return a serious misfortune made it impossible for him not to accept the kindness that surrounded him, prepared, according to his own doctrine, to flow into any one of a hundred forms of manifestation. Early on a damp and windy

summer morning his house caught fire, and he was obliged to work beyond his strength in the attempt to save his papers and other effects. The following day he was kept long in the blazing sun, and an illness ensued which, though not severe, marked the beginning of the decline in memory and the faculty of continued attention described by Dr. Holmes in a letter to Lowell: "Emerson is gently fading out like a photograph," he wrote; "the outlines are all there, but the details are getting fainter."

His friends in Concord had rallied to his assistance at the time of the fire, and, after it, had decided among themselves that the opportunity to be of further aid to him was not one to be passed by. A subscription was taken, and, first and last, more than fifteen thousand dollars were conveyed to him to be used in another European trip and for the rebuilding of his house. There could hardly have been a more severe test of his proud philosophy and loving temper than the acceptance of this spontaneous tribute provided. No reader of his chapter on *Gifts*, with his indomitable sincerity in mind, can fail to perceive the intense pathos of the occasion, or to realise in what courtesy of soul he finally bent to take the affectionate offering. "I am a lover of men," he wrote, "but this recent and wonderful experience of their tenderness surprises and occupies my thoughts day by day."

His third and last transatlantic voyage, taken under these auspices, brought him, by way of Eng-

land, France, and Italy, to Egypt, a land where there were no men to stimulate him, only colossal temples and strange trees to awaken his interest. In England Carlyle opened his arms to him in a brotherly embrace, and wondered at the "striking and curious" spectacle of a man so confidently cheerful in these dark days of the modern world. In England also he saw, now for the first time, Gladstone, Browning, and Ruskin, the last notable to him as expressing a gloom deeper than Carlyle's, and without the subsequent laugh that cleared the air for the Scotch misanthropist.

Upon his return to Concord he was met by crowds of his fellow-citizens, and passed through a flowery arch of triumph and between rows of school-children singing and cheering. By this joyous guard he was escorted to his new house, the counterpart of the old, in which every book, paper, and picture had been restored to its original position. Among all the eulogies, some of them sufficiently dithyrambic of a certainty, that marked Emerson's honour in his own country after his death, none were so eloquent as this labour of heart and hand spent freely for his happiness during his lifetime, and after his own day of industry was over. His comment, recorded by his son, is wholly characteristic, not only of himself but of the relation between him and his benefactors: "My friends!" he said, pausing on his threshold and turning to those who had accompanied him thither, "I know that this is not a tribute to an old man and

his daughter returned to their house, but to the common blood of us all—one family—in Concord!”

During the remaining years of his life he got out his last volume of essays, *Letters and Social Aims*, with the assistance of his friend, James Elliot Cabot, and spent much time looking over and indexing his journals. He lectured little, finding increasing difficulty in remembering words, although his mind was entirely clear. He continued to attend the Lyceum and heard the speakers who filled his place there with unfailing pleasure.

The failure of his mental machinery to respond to his will left his personal charm singularly undimmed. An artist, who came to his house to paint his portrait after his memory was nearly gone, said of him: “I see Mr. Emerson every day, and every day he asks me afresh my name,—and I never saw a greater man.” This dominating virtue of personality was long held to account for his pre-eminence among his contemporaries, but time has proved it, so far as it existed apart from his thought and vision, merely the lovely light in which the enduring features of his genius were at once made beautiful and to a degree obscured.

In the spring of 1882 he caught cold on one of his walks in the Concord neighbourhood, and after a few days of illness, the last one only spent in bed, he passed from earth, leaving the world different and better for his having been.

To make clear to ourselves why his effect thus

lives in us and helps us to diviner ends is an attempt as stimulating as it is difficult. Mr. Henry James has perhaps come as near as anyone to producing a phrase that epitomises his pervasive and evading genius: It is the genius "for seeing character as a real and supreme thing," and again: "With Emerson it is ever the special capacity for moral experience—always that and only that." Always that, but not only that. Combined with it is the capacity for æsthetic experience. Mr. James, when he walked with him in his old age through the galleries of the Louvre and of the Vatican, was struck with the anomaly of a man so refined and intelligent being so little spoken to by works of art. But what is still more striking is that a man so conscious of practical ethics and the problems of moral experience should so insistently be spoken to by the interior vision of beauty, and should so completely decline to consider morality apart from it. He was conscious of beauty, not as vaguer moralists have felt it, a mere quality of the spiritual attitude, but as artists feel it, with all its exacting claims and immutable laws, the result in the final analysis toward which creation moves. "Art has not yet come to its maturity," he says in an early essay, "if it do not put itself abreast with the most potent influences of the world, if it is not practical and moral, if it do not stand in connection with the conscience, if it do not make the poor and uncultivated feel that it addresses them with a voice of lofty cheer. There is higher work

for Art than the arts. They are abortive births of an imperfect or vitiated instinct. Art is the need to create ; but in its essence, immense and universal, it is impatient of working with lame or tied hands and of making cripples and monsters such as all pictures and statues are. Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end."

Possibly this genius for seeing character as the real and supreme thing, and for seeing beauty as the inevitable result of right character, the soul at work with line and light, together with the faculty, supremely his, of applying general principles to the needs of the "deep to-day" constitute the secret of his power over us. Had he been less firmly moral, had he loved beauty less passionately, had he spoken in language less pertinent to the present hour, he could hardly have touched so many of us. His voice is still heard in all our latest and most searching interrogation of the mysteries of being. We have not, after a hundred years, outlived him ; it is probable that we shall never outlive him, and for this reason, that he was a moral artist. His was the frame of mind in which an artist creates forms that endure, and his subject was the moral world. What more secure promise of permanence could be given ?



CHAPTER XIII.

THE FRENCH ESTIMATE.

“ONE reflection occurs immediately,” says Dr. Garnett, in 1888, discussing the perpetuity of Emerson’s fame, “he can never get beyond the English language. He has been excellently translated into German, and even into Italian: it is, perhaps, within the resources of French prose to provide a better translation still. But no merely French, or German, or Italian reader will have the least notion of the magic of his diction: hardly even will the foreigner well versed in English enjoy him to the full.”

Certainly no translation fully can render the peculiar charm of his highly individualised phrase, but it is an interesting fact that in France at least the appreciation of Emerson’s work was prompt and enthusiastic. Fifteen years before Hermann Grimm wrote of him, “He is as good as unknown among us in Germany,” his thought, his style, and his temper were being analysed with considerable skill and with genuine sympathy for the French public.



In 1847, within a few years after the publication of the *Essays* and while the *Poems* were still damp from the press, a writer in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, M. Émile Montégut, devoted thirty pages of that journal to the discussion of his quality, the distinction of which he proclaimed with no uncertainty of tone. His article opens with a designation now grown somewhat trite and wearying: "Emerson, like Montaigne, like Charron, like Shakespeare, is a sage." Following out his comparison, which doubtless seemed to his readers a bold one, M. Montégut describes the modern sage as lacking the systematic mind and rigorous logic of the ancients, declaring that in the sensuous life of the antique world it was true wisdom to concentrate the mind, as did Socrates and Seneca, upon a single point and to regulate the life by a single thought; but that amid the multiplied points of view and the innumerable mental snares of modernity even the sage has become adroit rather than audacious, walking with hesitation, and constantly observing his environment. Such is the rôle played by Montaigne, Charron, and Shakespeare,—the rôle of great observer. Such is the rôle also that Emerson fills, continually observing and continually seeking, but at one point surpassing these richly endowed companions—at the point of character. By his character and by the audacity and concentration of his thought he is allied to the ancients, and thus misses no virtue of his class: "All the qualities of the sage are in him,"

his critic finds,—“originality, spontaneity, sagacious observation, delicate analysis, the critical faculty, the absence of dogmatism.” The critical faculty, “the principal attribute of the true sage,” is eminent in him, and his writings contain a remarkable picture of the infirmities of the age, and a manly protest against them in the name of that individuality which is “stifled by the democratic system.” Nor is his style found to be less notable than his penetration of mind. The charming art of the *Essays*, effectually concealed from most of their contemporaneous commentators, is fully discussed. In using the essay form as a medium for his thought, Emerson, M. Montégut notes, has singularly modified it. To speak of the English essay from Addison to Hazlitt and Lamb is to suggest humour constantly upheaping, endless turns of phrase, unexpected thoughts, and, also, a certain lack of unity redeemed by richness and infinite variety of detail. But in Emerson there is “an art of composition distinguishing him from other moralists. Each of his essays abounds in detail and observation, but, once arrived at the end of the chapter, it is easy to discover the harmony under this apparent disorder.” Truly a wise young judge, writing at the time when Carlyle was comparing Emerson’s style with bags of duck-shot, and when critics less endowed were finding it obscure and confused and fitful. M. Montégut continues: “Chance thoughts attract him as they do Carlyle and Heine, but in his case the attrac-

tion has in it no element of danger. The American moralist can trust himself to the current of his reveries with the certainty of never losing sight either of the end to be attained or of the road by which to reach it. The tide of his imagination rises slowly, but it never deviates or drops. Ordinarily when I read the product of a poet, an orator, or a philosopher I can distinguish the moment when he is about to take his leap to become eloquent. There is an unexpected movement as if a stimulus were given to the imagination to enable it to spring, an effort often factitious, a beating of the wing. With Emerson there is nothing of the sort. His thought rises without exertion and without stir; not precipitately but gradually; he arrives at eloquence without its having been perceived that he was approaching it. When he has reached a certain height he pauses in an intermediary region between earth and heaven, and his philosophy thus avoids both the vagaries of mysticism and the commonplaces of ordinary moralising. An enthusiasm which is not exaltation, a sort of rapture not that of desire, a contemplation not that of ecstasy, an imagination of the soul tinted with the purest reflections from nature, sustain him in his middle sphere between the visible world and the infinite."

Here, also, is an appreciative passage upon the mingled sobriety and light-heartedness of Emerson's attitude toward nature, in which our own language is levied upon for the one right word:

“There is light and colour in his verse, but it is the light only found in shadowy solitudes and thick woods, the light perfectly expressed in English by the phrases, *sunny* woods, *sunny* groves. This word, which is wanting in our language, seems to me admirably to render the sense of light penetrating foliage and shadow, appearing in its golden concentration a palpable and material substance, and quite lacking the pallor of the higher light. ‘Sunny solitudes,’ Emerson calls his beloved woods, and we fitly might call his poetic reveries and philosophic inspirations ‘sunny soliloquies.’ ”

The article is filled with similar delicate tributes to Emerson’s gracious qualities as an artist, but the serious business of the criticism is to disclose his unique value as a writer upon questions of morality. This made a peculiar and definite appeal to the thoughtful French mind of the late forties. His attitude toward the individual, M. Montégut maintains, furnishes a salutary example to the student of European ideas at that moment. “From the moral point of view a society which should destroy genius and character would be an intolerable, impious, and iconoclastic society, for it would destroy the most beautiful work of art that exists, the individual character, the human soul, such as each of us may fashion by doing his duty. Of this Emerson is well aware, and therefore makes his protest on behalf of the individual. From the individual he exacts character and genius, from

society he exacts that it shall walk not in one uniform path, but take its way through many; that it shall not close itself against all issues in order that no person shall pass beyond certain limits, but that it give each person freedom to choose his way." It was long after this that Emerson's lecture on *Aristocracy* was published for the first time, with its more complete definition of this point of view. Had M. Montégut been writing with it before him this passage would have presented itself for quotation:

"The young adventurer finds that the relations of society, the position of classes, irk and sting him, and he lends himself to each malignant party that assails what is eminent. He will one day know that this is not removable, but a distinction in the nature of things; that neither the caucus, nor the newspaper, nor the Congress, nor the mob, nor the guillotine, nor fire, nor all together, can avail to outlaw, cut out, burn, or destroy the offence of superiority in persons. The manners, the pretensions, which annoy me so much are not superficial, but built on a real distinction in the nature of my companion. The superiority in him is inferiority in me, and if this particular companion were wiped by a sponge out of nature, my inferiority would still be made evident to me by other persons everywhere and every day."

But higher even than his teachings to the frantic apostles of democracy, higher than any immediate

influence that he could exert upon the turbulent social and political tendencies of the time, M. Montégut esteems Emerson's independence of all temporal questions and mutual considerations. With a fine exercise of his clear Gallic intelligence he grasps the dominating virtue of Emerson's mind and its importance in an age distinguished by shortness of sight and superficiality of interests. The ability to fix the attention upon eternal truth, undistracted by accidents of time and place, is the supreme achievement of either the ancient or the modern sage. This ability in Emerson is truly described as crowning all the evidences of his genius. "Posterity," his courageous critic concludes, "will not forget that he has given to our century what Montaigne gave to his, a new ideal of wisdom." He was quite right: posterity has not forgotten; nor has this still bolder prophecy failed of fulfilment:

"When the day comes that in the United States the superiority of Emerson is recognised without opposition, when his doctrines have fervent followers, when the majority of minds pronounce in his favour, there will have been a great change in the manners, the habits, the tendencies of America."

This preoccupation with Emerson on the part of a critic typically French in the disinterestedness of his mental processes and the orderliness and definiteness of his method, is interesting both as showing Emerson's appeal to the French intelligence through his freedom from exuberance, his impartial vision,

and his instinctive mental and moral balance; and as showing the positive value of criticism based on the application of a definite æsthetic and moral standard to literary phenomena. M. Montégut emphasised in his analysis of Emerson's newly discovered genius precisely the qualities that attract the critical attention toward him to-day, and whether or not his estimate of them is sound it is both responsible and discriminating.

When in 1850 he contributed to the *Revue* another article on Emerson, inspired by the publication of *Representative Men*, his mind was occupied with the part played by great men in bringing about the Revolution; and in comparing Emerson's book with Carlyle's *Hero Worship* he gave the preference to the latter because it places the greatness of energetic men, living and struggling among realities, higher than the greatness of the passive thinkers. It was more difficult for him sympathetically to appreciate the spirit which could, as he said, express ideas in 1848 precisely as they would have been expressed in 1846; and while he could admire the imperturbable confidence that was neither intimidated nor shaken by revolutions and reactions; that sacrificed nothing to the spirit of the moment; that discussed Plato and Swedenborg when the whole world had ears only for M. Prudhon and M. Louis Blanc; that praised the scepticism of Montaigne as if the century were not one that boasted of its absolute philosophies, he could not entirely acquiesce in what he calls

Emerson's theory of "easy greatness." He does not recognise in it what Carlyle calls the hero, but sees in it the great man only in an antique sense, in the modern sense the man of genius. "The great man as Emerson depicts him is the pagan, *par excellence*, the man whose grace comes by nature." But Christianity has changed the ideal of heroism. "In modern times man is no longer great by condition and by nature, but by task achieved, by incessant labour, by duty performed. How will it serve him to display his great soul? It is no longer anything but a symbol; as Emerson says, it is only the shadow of the ideal; but in ancient times it was a reality. To-day, thanks to Christianity, the humblest and poorest of men has an ideal more elevated than the soul of Epaminondas, Plato, or Homer." If this attitude is not so much at variance with that of Emerson as the writer narrowing his attention to the one book supposes, the next point of disagreement is more serious in its conventional acceptance of Emerson's indifference to the problem of evil. M. Montégut's tone, like that of Mr. Morley many years later, is one not of antagonism but of pained sincerity. Neither critic can recognise his modern interrogation of the universe in travail and suffering in Emerson's vision of a universe from which pain and evil are excluded by the reason that every man has lived scrupulously according to the inner law.

"This theory of easy greatness," M. Montégut argues, "is almost inadmissible, since Christianity

has recognised the existence of suffering and of sacrifice. Greatness is no longer the goal of man; it is no longer the end, it is but a means; the end lies beyond greatness itself. In ancient times individual greatness was the end, man attained nothing beyond supreme beauty; but in modern times beauty also is no more than the instrument of truth. Calm, that supreme attribute of truth, is no more; Christianity has stirred the soul to trouble by the example of the Saviour; he has given himself in trial and suffering, and has won for us an ideal of perfection which allows no repose. If calm and greatness sufficed, Christianity would have no excuse for being,—Stoicism would be enough. Thus the great enemy of Christianity, Spinoza, has attempted to revive and exalt all the calm and serene attributes of antique virtue. He who has replaced in virtue the hero and great man of ancient times is not the modern hero but the saint. . . . It is only the saint who possesses the gift of power to live with the divine and the intellectual without the temptation to dominate these celestial forces, who can let himself be inspired by them with the simplicity of the child.”

In spite, however, of the fact that Emerson does not lay sufficient stress on the beauty of overcoming to please his critic to whom the fine passage on Fate and Free-will in the *Conduct of Life* has not yet spoken, it is granted that his theory of great men is infinitely to be preferred to the then popular theory of the power of circumstances to create greatness;

and the doctrine so pungently expressed in the poem on *The Celestial Love*

He that feeds men serveth few;
He serves all who dares be true,

is analysed and reapplied with lively appreciation of its worth.

From the time of this article to the end of the century Emerson was the subject of but two more critical papers in the *Revue*, one of them by M. Montégut on *English Traits*, the other a superficial and unenlightening discussion of the *Poems* by Th. Bentzon. In 1902 came another long and thorough investigation of the substance and form of Emerson's work,—this time by M. Roz, a much less sympathetic interpreter than M. Montégut, but no less earnest or intelligent. Finding that Emerson's thought belongs essentially to his country and time, and that it loses much of its prestige in crossing the Atlantic, he freely accords him the distinction of writing from a point of view in astonishing conformity with the needs and aspirations of that time and country. "Other countries and other epochs have given greater thinkers; none, to use his own phrase, a more *representative* one."

In order to comprehend the usefulness of such idealism as Emerson taught, one must understand, M. Roz assures his countrymen, the crying need of the young democracy which, to his mind, was fast crumbling into a dust of independent units, and

if the quietism at which Emerson's individualism strangely arrives is at first sight disconcerting, it must be borne in mind that "the American world in which the practical sense is always awake, has only too marked a tendency to attach itself to works. There is no need to teach it the value of action, of effort, of enterprise. What is important, on the contrary, is to lead it to recognise the worth of love, of the interior sentiments." What is most difficult for M. Roz to justify is Emerson's optimism. This he accepts as the ineluctable consequence of his system and the fundamental tendency of his mind, but he feels that his hope is akin to indifference; his insistence upon the obligation of each individual to collaborate with the good intentions of the universe is offset by his dislike of admitting the difficulties, struggles, and disabilities of human nature in its weakness. This, in essence, is the complaint of M. Montégut, and of Mr. Morley as well, and arises, certainly, through no impatient or ineffectual examination of Emerson's writings. But is it a reasonable complaint? If it is, we have to admit that Emerson, despite his extraordinary endowment, is not a writer to move hearts; that he is the mere illustrator of ideas and not a student and teacher of life. Unquestionably it is true that in his writings Emerson declined to dwell upon the presence of evil in the world, and it is true that, as M. Roz with some disapproval points out, he did counsel the suppression of all reference to personal ailments either of body or

soul. There seems to be but one explanation at once consistent with these facts and with our conception of Emerson as the friend of man, the lover of his kind. His French critics and some of his English critics have commented upon his singular blending of individuality with universal aims and interests. But it is upon the union of these apparently opposing elements in humanity that he bases his hope for a regenerated world. Before all of us he holds the ideal life, the rounded perfection of beauty in thought, conduct, and aspiration. To each of us he leaves the solution of our individual problems, our grapple with the special evil that threatens or defect that limits. That is our part, quite sacredly our own, and not to be pried into or meddled with by even the moralist. His part is to display the goal, to lure with visions of the exquisite outcome of duty performed, never more radiantly shown as the rainbow of the soul, to stimulate with accounts of the worth of goodness and truth, the ravishing charm of virtue. Both the evil of intention and the evil of accident are indeed left out of his scheme, not, perhaps, because he is indifferent to the suffering they cause, but because his way of inspiring man's soul with the hope that quickens is to show the kingdom of righteousness as though it were the pearl of great price, to obtain which a man might well give all that he had of other treasure. This is the "indirect service" which is all, he says, that any man has it in his power to render another; this is the life-giving light of influence

that pours down upon the heart and causes it to blossom in good deeds. If self-sacrifice is not preached it is included in self-development such as he urges upon the individual. As M. Montégut in one of his papers has explained, Emerson does not set up great men, as Carlyle does, in the position of natural guides of the people, antique demi-gods, or apostles, but as terrestrial types of the divine and holy, at once mirrors of nature and temples of God. Toward common men he held the same attitude. In fact, "There are no common men," he says. "All men are at last of a size, and true art is only possible on the conviction that every talent has its apotheosis somewhere." Each man has in him the divinity according to which he must live and by which he must learn his method, whether it turn out to be self-sacrifice or the enjoyment of different opportunity. To the deeply religious mind there is no shock in this assumption. Is it not from the highest Christian source that we have learned to call ourselves "gods" without blaspheming?

Possibly the inclination to regard Emerson's optimism as of the heartless type is due to a perfectly simple and, on the whole, natural error in defining his attitude toward life, an error avoidable only by attempting to discern as far as possible the mood in which he advocated receptivity and serenity. He is taxed with the defects of an exclusive doctrine, when, apparently, his controlling intention was to teach a morality the most inclusive to be conceived.

M. Roz, for example, finds his serenity more or less disdainful and distant, and affirms that in his counsel to us to be as a shadow crossed by a ray of divine light he takes too little cognisance of the human obstacles retarding and interrupting the ray's transit; of our need for all strength and all help in overcoming them. To begin with, the passage from which this specific illustration of Emerson's theory is taken is marked by one of his rare modifications: "Great genial power, *one would almost say*, consists in not being original at all; in being altogether receptive; in letting the world do all, and suffering the spirit of the hour to pass unobstructed through the mind." But, of course, there are passages in plenty to convey the general idea as M. Roz has grasped it. Other passages, however, to be read in connection with these theories, in which Emerson speaks of conduct, show his belief in self-discipline and moral action with entire recognition of all the demons that fight against morality and faith. Man contends with the strength of his moral nature against the accidents and foes that would destroy his belief in ultimate good. "When his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does with knowledge what the stones do by structure." In other words, he clears away the obstacles blocking his heart against the divine ray. His acquiescence in the order of the universe at the moment when it is most cruel and crushing presupposes the elevation of his mind and soul

to the perception of love and goodness. "One way is right to go: the hero sees it and moves on that aim, and has the world under him for root and support." This surely is not only the clear-seeing but the right-acting hero. "I know not whether there be, as is alleged, in the upper region of our atmosphere a permanent westerly current, which carries with it all atoms which rise to that height, but I see that when souls reach a certain clearness of perception, they accept a knowledge and motive above selfishness. A breath of will blows eternally through the universe of souls in the direction of the Right and Necessary. It is the air which all intellects inhale and exhale, and it is the wind which blows the worlds into order and orbit." The entire chapter on Fate in which Emerson once for all sums up the horrors of our existence, breathes the spirit of Christianity, the spirit that inspires the saint and the sage to suffer for the universal benefit. "I come," said Christ, "not to destroy the law but to fulfil it." From centuries before his day what Emerson calls "the Beautiful Necessity" has been regarded by the sceptical as the tyrant of our life. Emerson's scepticism is of a different order. Sceptical of essential evil, he can write in a spirit as purely religious as that of the devout martyrs: "If we thought men were free in the sense that in a single exception one fantastical will could prevail over the law of things, it were all one as if a child's hand could pull down the sun. If in the least particular, one could derange the order

of nature,—who would accept the gift of life? ” Obviously this is neither disdain nor egoism. If it is a doctrine too passive for the modern world it awaits the growth of the modern world to its altitude of reasonable faith.

For Emerson’s appreciation of the scientific spirit and joyous acceptance of scientific discovery M. Roz has naturally the most cordial admiration, and his estimate of Emerson’s art, particularly as shown in his prose, echoes M. Montégut’s favourable verdict. “ He is a poet by virtue of his tone; a creative power dwells in his words. . . . Like Socrates, whom he loved, he deems that truth belongs to all, is at the doorway of all; that the task of the philosopher is to make it admired and beloved. Thus, perchance, his surest originality lies in the fact that he warms all truth at the fires of moral and poetic imagination. For all truth interests him. This is plainly to be seen in the variety of his work. He borrows from theology and science, æsthetics and morals, history and legend. He looks in every direction, and all the objects beheld by him illuminate one another in his eyes, reveal to him their hidden relations, their secret harmonies. Hence the charm, slightly whimsical at times but nearly always compelling, of his style.”

In these criticisms Emerson is at least made real to the French public. Through them he is seen to be a dignified and unique figure in literature, and his message is coherently rendered. Curiously, also, it





is a French writer—a Belgian writing in French—who has most adequately commented upon the element in his work most valuable to the common mind, and least often dwelt upon by judicial critics,—his power, that is, of casting glory over the common day, of seeing grandeur in our dust. M. Maurice Maeterlinck has chosen, characteristically, to embody his criticism of Emerson in the indirect manner of the impressionist; and as no synopsis or report of his essay could in the least represent its spirit it is translated in its complete form as it appeared in *Le Trésor des Humbles*:

“ ‘One sole thing matters,’ says Novalis,—‘the quest, that is, of our transcendental self.’ This self we perceive at times in God’s word, in that of poets and sages, in the deeps of certain joys and certain sorrows, in slumber, love, and illness, at sudden moments when from afar it signals to us and points to our relation with the universe.

“ ‘Certain wise men have pursued no other quest than this and have written those books in which only the extraordinary reigns. ‘What is there of value in books,’ our author says, ‘save the transcendental and the rare?’ These men are like painters striving in the dark to gain a likeness. Some have traced abstract images of great size but nearly indistinguishable. Others have succeeded in fixing an attitude or habitual gesture of the higher life. Many have imagined strange beings. These pictures are not numerous. They are never alike.

Some are very beautiful, and those who have not looked upon them are, during their whole lifetime, like men who have never been out of doors at noon-day. There are those drawn in line purer than that of heaven ; and these figures appear to us so far distant that we are ignorant whether they live or were copied from ourselves. These are the work of the pure mystics, and in them man does not yet recognise himself. Others, called poets, have told us indirectly of these things. A third class of thinkers, raising by one degree the old myth of the Centaurs, has given a more accessible image of this occult identity by mingling the outlines of our apparent self with those of our higher self. The countenance of our soul divine smiles now and again over the shoulder of the human soul, her sister, bending to lowly tasks of thought ; and that smile, revealing glimpses of all that exists beyond the limits of thought, is all that matters in the works of man.

“They are not many who have shown us that man is greater and more profound than man, and who have succeeded in fixing thus some of the eternal suggestions encountered by us at every moment of life, in a gesture, a sign, a look, a word, in silence, and in the events that hedge us about. The science of human grandeur is the strangest of sciences. None among men is ignorant of it; but hardly one knows that he possesses it. The child who meets me will not be able to tell its mother that which it has seen; and yet from the moment its eye has rested

on me it knows all that I am, all that I have been and shall be, as well as my brother, and three times better than myself. It knows me instantly in the past and future, in the present world and in other worlds ; and its eyes in turn reveal to me the part I play in the universe and in eternity. Infallible souls are judged by one another; and from the first instant its eyes have taken in mine, my face, my attitude, and the infinite by which these are surrounded and of which they are interpreters, the child knows upon what to rely; and even though he does not yet distinguish the crown of an emperor from the wallet of a beggar, he has for one moment known me as accurately as God.

“In truth we already behave as the gods, and our entire life passes amid infinite certainties and infallibilities. But we are blind men playing with precious stones along the road ; and this man knocking at my door dispenses, at the moment of greeting, spiritual treasures as marvellous as any gifts a prince whom I might have snatched from death could bestow upon me. I open to him, and in an instant he sees at his feet, as from the summit of a tower, all that takes place between two souls. The peasant woman of whom I ask my way I judge as deeply as though I asked my mother’s life of her ; and my own soul has spoken to me as intimately as that of my betrothed. She rises swiftly to the highest mysteries before replying, then tells me tranquilly, knowing what I am at a glance, that I must take the path to the left for

the village. If I pass an hour in the midst of a crowd, I have judged the living and the dead a thousand times silently, and with but a moment's thought, and which of these judgments shall be changed at the last day ? There are in this room five or six beings who speak of rain and of fine weather ; but above this paltry conversation their souls hold intercourse which no human wisdom could approach without danger ; and though they speak through look and gesture, and face, and presence, what they have said they will never know. They must await, however, the end of their indiscernible dialogue, and that is why they have I know not what of mysterious joy in their languor without comprehending that which in them hearkens to all the laws of life, and death, and love which flow like never-failing rivers around their abode.

“Thus is it everywhere and always. We live only by our transcendental being whose acts and thoughts each moment pierce the envelope surrounding us.

“I go to-day to see a friend whom I have never seen ; but I know his work and I know that his soul is extraordinary and that he has spent his life in manifesting it as exactly as possible in accord with the duty of the higher minds. I am anxious and the hour is solemn. He enters ; and all the explanations he has given us in the course of many years fall in dust at the opening of the door to admit him. He is not that which he believes himself to be. He is other than his thought. Once again we prove that the

emissaries of the mind are ever faithless. He has spoken deep things about his soul ; but in that little instant between the glance that pauses and the glance withdrawn, I have learned all that he will never be able to say and all that he will never be able to make alive in his mind. He belongs to me henceforth irrevocably. Formerly we were united by a thought. To-day something many thousand times more mysterious than thought delivers us into one another's hands. For years we have looked forward to this moment ; and now we feel that all is useless, and in fear of silence we who were prepared to show each other vast and secret treasures talk together of the striking hour or the setting sun, that our souls may have time to wonder at each other, and drop away into another silence, not to be troubled by the murmur of lips and thoughts.

“At bottom, we live only from soul to soul and are gods without knowing it. If to-night, unable to endure my solitude, I go down among men, they will tell me that the storm has beaten their pears to the ground, or that the last frosts have closed the harbour. Is it for this that I have come ? And yet I shall soon depart, my soul as satisfied and strengthened and filled with new treasure as though I had passed these hours with Plato, Socrates, and Marcus Aurelius. What their lips speak is unheard beside what their presence proclaims, and it is impossible for man not to be great and admirable. What thought thinks is of no importance by the side of the truth that we are,

affirmed in silence ; and if, after fifty years of solitude, Epictetus, Goethe, and St. Paul were to touch upon my island they could tell me only what the light spray of their bark must tell me at the same time and perhaps more directly. In truth, that which in man is strangest is his gravity and hidden sagacity. The most frivolous among us never really laughs and in spite of his efforts never succeeds in losing a moment, for the human soul is watchful and does nothing uselessly. *Ernst ist das Leben* (life is earnest), and in the depths of our being our soul has not yet smiled. On the other side of our involuntary agitations we lead a wonderful existence, motionless and very pure and very sure, at which our out-stretched hands, our opening eyes, our meeting glances, continually hint.

“All our organs are mystical accomplices of a higher being, and it is never a man but a soul that we have known. I have never seen the poor man begging alms on my doorstep without perceiving one thing else, the identical destinies in our eyes greeting one another, and at the moment he stretches forth his hand the little house-door opens for an instant upon the sea. ‘In my dealing with my child,’ says Emerson, ‘my Latin and Greek, my accomplishments and my money stead me nothing ; but as much soul as I have avails. If I am wilful, he sets his will against mine, and leaves me, if I please, the degradation of beating him by my superiority of strength.

“ ‘But if I renounce my will and act for the soul,

setting that up as umpire between us two, out of his young eyes looks the same soul; he reveres and loves with me.'

"But if it is true that the last among us cannot make the smallest gesture without taking account of the soul and the spiritual kingdoms over which it reigns, it is also true that the wisest hardly ever thinks of the infinite which acts through the eyelid opening, the head inclining, the hand closing. We live so far from ourselves that we are ignorant of nearly all that takes place on the horizon of our being. We wander at random in the valley, unsuspecting that all our movements appear again with their true significance upon the summit of the mountain; and we need that some one come to us from time to time to say: 'Lift up your eyes, behold what you are, behold what you are doing; it is not here that we live; it is yonder on high.' This glance exchanged in the shadow; these words, meaningless in the valley, — behold the meaning they take on beyond those snowy peaks, and how our hands, that we believe so weak and small, touch God at every moment, without knowing it.

"There are those who have come to lay hand upon our shoulder and point out to us what is taking place upon the glaciers of mystery. They are not many: there are three or four of them in this century. There have been five or six in others; and all that they are able to tell us is as nothing beside what exists and is known by our soul. But what matter?

Are we not like one who in early childhood has lost his sight? He has seen the measureless spectacle of creation. He has seen the sun, the sea, and the forest. Now these marvels for ever belong to him; and should you speak of them what could you say to him, and what would your poor words be beside the forest-glade, the tempest, and the daybreak which still live in the depths of mind and flesh? He will, however, listen to you with ardent and amazed delight, and though he knows all, and though your words represent that which he knows more imperfectly than a glass of water represents a great river, the little feeble phrases falling from the lips of man will for an instant illuminate the ocean, the day, and the sombre foliage sleeping amid shadows under his lifeless lids.

“The facets of this ‘transcendental self,’ of which Novalis speaks, are no doubt innumerable, and no two of the mystic moralists have succeeded in studying the same one. Swedenborg, Pascal, Novalis, Hello, and others examine our relations endlessly, abstrusely, subtly, and from afar off.

“They lead us over mountains where not all the summits seem either habitable or natural, and where we often breathe with pain. Goethe accompanies our soul upon the shores of the sea of serenity. Marcus Aurelius establishes it upon the hillside of a humanity weary in its perfection, and under the too heavy foliage of hopeless resignation. Carlyle, the spiritual brother of Emerson, who in this century has

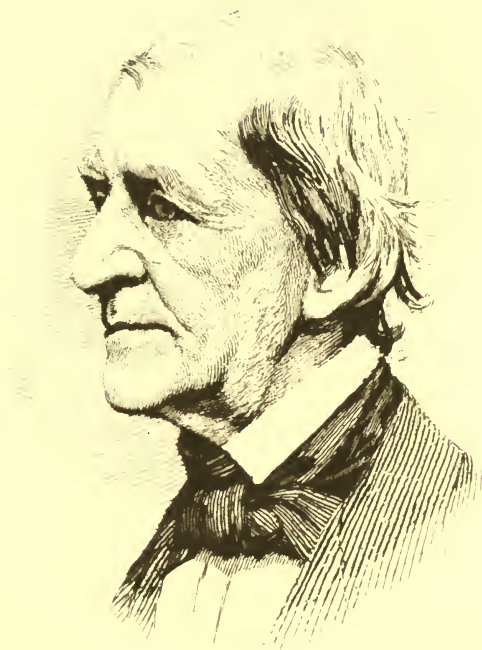
told us of the opposite end of the valley, shows single heroic moments of our being in lightning flashes against a background of cloud and storm, of an Unknown never other than monstrous. He leads us like a flock dispersed by tempest toward strange sulphurous pastures. He thrusts us into the deepest of the shadows which he has joyously discovered, lighted only by the intermittent fierce star of heroes, and there abandons us with wicked laughter to the vast reprisals of mystery.

“But here at the same moment is Emerson, the good shepherd of the morning, in the pale verdant meadows of a new optimism, natural and credible. He does not insist that we skirt the abyss. He does not take us out of the humble familiar inclosure, for the glacier, the sea, the eternal snows, the palace, the stable, the funeral pall of the pauper, the bed of sickness, are all under the same heavens, purified by the same stars, and subject to the same infinite forces.

“To many he has come at the moment of need, at the instant when they were in mortal want of new interpretations. The periods of heroism have faded out of sight, those of abnegation have not yet come; nothing is left us but the daily life, still we cannot live without greatness. He has given to this life, divested of its traditional horizon, an almost satisfactory meaning, and possibly he has shown us that it is strange and deep and broad enough to be its own excuse. He knows no more of it than others, but he affirms with greater courage, and he has

confidence in the mystery. You must live, all you who pass through the days and years without activity, without thought, without light, because your life, in spite of everything, is incomprehensible and divine. You must live, because no one has the right to subtract from the spiritual events of commonplace weeks. You must live, because there are no hours without their intimate miracles and ineffable meanings. You must live, because there is not an act, not a word, not a movement which escapes the inexplicable claims of a world 'where there are many things to do, and few things to know.'

"Life is neither great nor small, and the deed of Regulus or Leonidas has no importance when I compare it with one moment of my soul's secret being. That soul might or might not be able to do what they have done; these things do not touch it; and the soul of Regulus, when he was returning from Carthage, was probably as distraught and as indifferent as that of the workman on his way to his factory. It is too removed from all our deeds; it is too removed from all our thoughts. It lives alone within us a life of which it does not speak; and from the heights where it reigns the variety in our life is not distinguishable. We walk weighed down by our soul, and there is no proportion between it and ourselves. Possibly it never considers what we are doing, and this fact may be read in our faces. If one would interrogate a mind from another world as to the typical expression of the human countenance, it





would no doubt reply, after having seen mankind in joy, in grief, and in anxiety: '*They have the air of thinking of something else.*' Be great, be wise and eloquent; the soul of the poor man stretching out his hand for alms at the corner of the bridge will not be envious, but yours perhaps will envy him his silence. Heroes have need of the common man's approbation, but the common man does not ask the approbation of heroes, and follows his way without anxiety, as one who has all his treasures secure. 'When Socrates speaks,' says Emerson, 'Lysis and Menexenus are afflicted by no shame that they do not speak. They also are good. He likewise defers to them, loves them, whilst he speaks. Because a true and natural man contains and is the same truth which an eloquent man articulates; but in the eloquent man, because he can articulate it, it seems something the less to reside, and he turns to these, silent, beautiful, with the more inclination and respect.'

"Man is avid for explanations. He demands that his life be shown him. He rejoices to find somewhere the exact interpretation of a little gesture he has been using for the past twenty-five years. Here there is no little gesture, but the universal attitude of the common soul. You will not find here the eternal quality of a Marcus Aurelius. But Marcus Aurelius is thought incarnate. Moreover, which of us leads the life of a Marcus Aurelius? One is man here and nothing more. He is not arbitrarily

magnified; only he is brought nearer to us than usual. It is John who cuts down the trees; it is Peter building his house; it is you speaking to me of the harvest; it is I giving you my hand; but we are taken at our point of contact with the gods, and are astonished at what we do. We did not know that all the powers of the soul are present, we did not know that all the laws of the universe attend upon us; and we turn round and stare at each other speechless, like people who have beheld a miracle.

“Emerson came to affirm simply this equal and secret grandeur of our life. He has enveloped us with silence and wonder. He has placed a ray of light under the foot of the artisan coming out of his shop. He has shown us all the forces of heaven and earth, busy holding up the threshold on which two neighbours speak of the falling rain and the rising wind. And above the two wayfarers, pausing for their chat, he shows us the face of one god smiling upon another. He is nearer than any one else to our habitual life. He is the most watchful to warn, the most assiduous, the most honest, the most scrupulous, perhaps the most human. He is the sage of the common day, and common days make up the sum of our existence. More than one year rolls by without passions, without virtues, without miracles. Let us learn to revere the petty hours of life. If I have acted this morning in the spirit of Marcus Aurelius, do not emphasise my deeds, for I myself am aware that something has been achieved. But





if I think I have lost my day in poor enterprises, and if you can prove that nevertheless I have lived as deeply as a hero, and that my soul has not lost its rights, you will have done more than if you had persuaded me to save my enemy upon this day, for you have augmented in me the sum, the grandeur, and the desire of life, and to-morrow, perchance, I shall be able to live with self-respect."

Certainly the French critics cannot be said to have neglected Emerson's claim to detailed consideration; and that they so early perceived and so long discussed his service to humanity may reasonably be considered to prove not only their perspicacity but the far-reaching character of that service. It has been said, by a Frenchman, that we know French literature through the blusterers. We cannot retaliate. The French have taken pains to know us by the best we have produced. In their estimates of Emerson they have stood as a generous illustration of his words: "The genius of life is friendly to the noble, and in the dark brings them friends from far."





APPENDIX.

THE following tables of contents for the sixteen numbers of *The Dial* are based on those given in Mr. George Willis Cooke's article on the origin and character of the magazine in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* for 1886. Those articles attributed to Emerson by Mr. Cooke, and omitted in Mr. Cabot's list of his contributions to *The Dial*, are marked with a star. The ones considered by Mr. Cabot doubtful are marked with a dagger; and the ones ascribed to Emerson by Mr. Cabot and omitted by Mr. Cooke are printed in italics.

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VOLUME I. NUMBER I.

CONTENTS.

The Editors to the Reader . . .	1—R. W. Emerson.
A Short Essay on Critics . . .	5—Margaret Fuller.

To the Aurora Borealis . . .	11—C. P. Cranch.
Notes from the Journal of a Scholar . . .	13—C. C. Emerson.
The Religion of Beauty . . .	17—Dwight.
Brownson's Writing . . .	22—Geo. Ripley.
The Last Farewell . . .	47—E. B. Emerson.
Ernest the Seeker (Chapter First) . . .	48—W. H. Channing.
The Divine Presence in Nature and in the Soul . . .	58—Theo. Parker.
Sympathy . . .	71—Thoreau.
Lines . . .	72—Ellen T. Emerson.
Allston Exhibition . . .	73—Margaret Fuller.
Song. S. G. Ward.—To ——— . . .	84—R. W. Emerson.
Orphic Sayings . . .	85—A. B. Alcott.
Stanzas . . .	98—C. P. Cranch.
Channing's Translation of Jouffroy . . .	99—W. D. Wilson.
Aulus Persius Flaccus . . .	117—Thoreau.
The Shield . . .	121—S. G. Ward.
The Problem . . .	122—R. W. Emerson.
Come Morir? . . .	123—S. G. Ward.
I Slept and Dreamed that Life was Beauty . . .	123—Ellen Hooper.
The Concerts of the Past Winter . . .	124—Dwight.
A Dialogue . . .	134—Margaret Fuller.
Richter—In the Morning Breeze . . .	135—Margaret Fuller.
Dante . . .	136—Sarah Freeman Clarke.
Sketches . . .	136—Margaret Fuller.

VOLUME I. NUMBER 2.

Thoughts on Modern Literature . . .	137—R. W. Emerson.
Silence . . .	158—R. W. Emerson.
First Crossing the Alleghanies . . .	159—J. F. Clarke.
A Sign From the West . . .	161—C. P. Cranch.
Angelica Sleeps . . .	172
Nature and Art; or, The Three Landscapes . . .	173—J. F. Clarke.
The Art of Life: The Scholar's Call- ing . . .	175—F. H. Hedge.
Letters to a Theological Student . . .	183—Geo. Ripley.
"The Poor Rich Man" . . .	187—Ellen Hooper.

Musings of a Recluse	188—C. P. Cranch.
The Wood Fire	193—Ellen Hooper.
The Day Breaks	193—C. S. Tappan.
The Poet	194—Ellen Hooper.
Life	195—C. S. Tappan.
Evening	195—C. S. Tappan.
A Lesson for the Day	196—Th. Parker.
Wayfarers	216—Ellen Hooper.
From Goethe	216
Pæan	217—C. S. Tappan.
Lyric	217—C. S. Tappan.
Truth against the World	218—Th. Parker.
Waves	219—C. S. Tappan.
New Poetry	220—R. W. Emerson.
Art and Artist	232—C. S. Tappan.
Ernest the Seeker (Chapter Second)	233—W. H. Channing.
Woodnotes: Number I.	242—R. W. Emerson.
Life and Death	245—C. S. Tappan.
Record of the Months	246
The Works of William E. Channing, D. D. Four Volumes. Third Edition. Glasgow. 1840	246—R. W. Emerson.*
Two Sermons on the Kind Treatment and on the Emancipation of Slaves. Preached at Mobile. With a Prefatory Statement. By George F. Simmons	248—R. W. Emerson.*
A Letter to those who Think. By Edward Palmer	251
Professor Walker's Vindication of Philosophy	256
The Athenæum Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture	260—Margaret Fuller.
Select List of Recent Publications	264
Dana's Two Years before the Mast	Emerson. ?
Fourier's Social Destiny of Man	Emerson. †
Ranke's Popes	Parker.

Harwood's Materialism in Re-

ligion

Emerson.

Cousin's Plato

VOLUME I. NUMBER 3.

Man in the Ages	273—Th. T. Stone.
Afternoon	289—C. S. Tappan.
Questionings	290—F. H. Hedge.
Endymion	291—C. P. Cranch.
Hymn and Prayer	292—J. F. Clarke.
Klopstock and Meta	293—Margaret Fuller.
The True in Dreams	298—C. P. Cranch.
The Magnolia of Lake Pontchar-	
train	299—Margaret Fuller.
Love and Insight	305—C. S. Tappan.
Sunset	305—C. S. Tappan.
Give us an Interpreter	306—C. S. Tappan.
Ideals of Every-Day Life. No. I.	307—J. S. Dwight.
To Nydia	312—J. F. Clarke.
The Violet	314—Ellen Tucker Emerson.
Stanzas	314—H. D. Thoreau.
German Literature	315—Th. Parker.
The Snow-Storm	339—R. W. Emerson.
Menzel's View of Goethe	340—Margaret Fuller.
Suum Cuique	347—R. W. Emerson.
The Sphinx	348—R. W. Emerson.
Orphic Sayings	351—A. B. Alcott.
Woman	362—Sophia Ripley.
Sonnet	366—J. R. Lowell.
Thoughts on Art	367—R. W. Emerson.
Glimmerings	379—C. P. Cranch.
Letters from Italy on the Repre-	
sentatives of Italy	386—S. G. Ward.
To the Ideal	400—Ellen Hooper.
Record of the Months	401
Michael Angelo Considered as a	
Philosophic Poet, with Trans-	
lations. By John Edward	
Taylor	401—R. W. Emerson. †

Select List of Recent Publications	402
Robbins's Worship of the Soul	402—R. W. Emerson.†

VOLUME I. NUMBER 4.

The Unitarian Movement in New England	409—W. D. Wilson.
Dream	443—J. F. Clarke.
Ideals of Every-Day Life. No. II.	
Home	446—J. S. Dwight.
Listen to the Wind	461—Ellen Hooper.
The Wind Again	461—Ellen Hooper.
Leila	462—Margaret Fuller.
The Genuine Portrait	468—J. F. Clarke.
The Real and the Ideal	468—J. F. Clarke.
Hermitage	469—W. E. Channing.
The Angel and the Artist	469—Caroline S. Tappan.
Shelley	470—John M. Mackie.
A Dialogue	494—Margaret Fuller.
Thoughts on Labour	497—Theodore Parker.
The Out-Bid	519—Ellen Hooper.
Theme for a World Drama	520—W. E. Channing.
Man, the Reformer	523—R. W. Emerson.
Music of the Winter	539—O. F. Tuckerman.
Farewell	544—Ellen Hooper.

VOLUME II. NUMBER 1.

Goethe	1—Margaret Fuller.
Two Hymns	42—E. T. Clapp.
Night and Day	45—W. H. Channing.
The Blind Seer	47—C. P. Cranch.
Wheat Seed and Bolted Flour	48—W. H. Channing.
Song	52
Need of a Diver	53—Margaret Fuller.
Clouds	55—E. T. Clapp.
"The Future is better than the Past"	57—E. T. Clapp.
August Shower	58—E. T. Clapp.
The Pharisees	59—Theodore Parker.
Protean Wishes	77—Theodore Parker.

Painting and Sculpture	78—Sophia Ripley.
Sic Vita	81—H. D. Thoreau.
Bettina	82—Caroline S. Tappan.
Prophecy—Transcendentalism—	
Progress	83—J. A. Saxton.
Sonnet to —	121—W. E. Channing.
Letter	122—Sophia Ripley.
Lines	129—Caroline S. Tappan.
Sonnet	129—J. R. Lowell.
Notices of Recent Publications	130
Jones Very's Essays and Poems	130—R. W. Emerson.
Carlyle's On Heroes	131—Margaret Fuller.
Lowell's A Year's Life	133
Translations of Goethe	134
H. Martineau's Hour and Man	134—Margaret Fuller.
Tennyson, Stirling, and Festus	135—Margaret Fuller.
The Plain Speaker	135—Margaret Fuller.
Lines	136—Sara A. Chase.
To Contributors	136—Margaret Fuller.

VOLUME II. NUMBER 2.

Cupid's Conflict,

By Dr. Henry More, 1647	137—Selected by A. B. Alcott.
-----------------------------------	----------------------------------

Lives of the Great Composers :

Haydn, Mozart, Handel, Bach,	
Beethoven	148—Margaret Fuller.
Light and Shade	203—Caroline S. Tappan.
Friendship	204—H. D. Thoreau.
Painting and Sculpture	205—R. W. Emerson.
Fate	205—R. W. Emerson.
Woodnotes : Number II.	207—R. W. Emerson.
A Glimpse of Christ's Idea of	
Society	214—Elizabeth P. Peabody.
Poems on Life	228
Windmill	230—W. E. Channing.
Festus	231—Margaret Fuller.
Walter Savage Landor	262—R. W. Emerson.
Inworld	271—C. P. Cranch.

VOLUME II. NUMBER 3.

First Principles	273—W. B. Greene.
(Poetical Motto)	286—W. E. Channing.
Yuca Filamentosa	286—Margaret Fuller.
Inworld	288—C. P. Cranch.
Outworld	290—C. P. Cranch.
Primitive Christianity	292—Th. Parker.
Bettine Brentano and her friend Günderode	313—Margaret Fuller.
Sonnet	357—J. R. Lowell.
Sonnet	357—J. R. Lowell.
Sonnet. To Irene on her Birthday	358—J. R. Lowell.
The Hour of Reckoning	358—Ellen Hooper.
Sonnet. To Mary on her Birthday	359—B. F. Presbury.
De Profundis Clamavi	359
Music. To Martha	360—B. F. Presbury.
Plan of the West Roxbury Com- munity	361—E. P. Peabody.
The Park	373—R. W. Emerson.
Forbearance	373—R. W. Emerson.
Grace	373—R. W. Emerson.
The Senses and the Soul	374—R. W. Emerson.
Epilogue to the Tragedy of Essex. From the German of Goethe	380—M. Fuller.
Editor's Table	382
Transcendentalism	382—R. W. Emerson.
(Calvinist's Letter)	382—Th. T. Stone.
(Friend's Letter)	383
Notices of Recent Publications	385
Plan of Salvation	385—J. F. Clarke.
Motherwell's Poems	393
Goethe's Egmont	394—Margaret Fuller.
Monaldi	395—Margaret Fuller.
Wilde's Conjectures and Re- searches	399—Margaret Fuller.
Boston Academy of Music	407
Theory of Teaching	408
The Ideal Man	408—R. W. Emerson. †

VOLUME II. NUMBER 4.

Note to the Editor	409—A. B. Alcott.
Days from a Diary	409—A. B. Alcott.
Marie van Oosterwich. Translated	
from the French	437—Margaret Fuller.
Silence and Speech	483—C. P. Cranch.
Thoughts on Theology	485—Theodore Parker.
Herzliebste	528—Ch. A. Dana.
Record of the Months	529
Whewell's Inductive Sciences .	529—Th. Parker.
Whewell's Morals	530—Th. Parker.
Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History	531—Th. Parker.
Harwood's German Anti-Super-	
naturalism	535—Th. Parker.
Republications	539—Th. Parker.
Milman's History of Christianity	540—Th. Parker.
Gibbon's Rome, edited by Mil-	
man	542—Th. Parker.

VOLUME III. NUMBER 1.

Lectures on the Times. Intro-	
ductory	1—R. W. Emerson.
Natural History of Massachusetts	19—H. D. Thoreau.
Gifts	40—W. E. Channing.
The Lover's Song	41—W. E. Channing.
Sea-Song	42—W. E. Channing.
The Earth-Spirit	42—W. E. Channing.
Prayer	42—W. E. Channing.
After-Life	43—W. E. Channing.
Autumn Leaves	44—W. E. Channing.
Entertainments of the Past Winter	46—Margaret Fuller.
Tact	72—R. W. Emerson.
Holidays	73—R. W. Emerson.
The Amulet	73—R. W. Emerson.
The Castle by the Sea. From	
Uhland	74—Tr. by F. H. Hedge.
Eternity	75—Ch. A. Dana.
Vespers	76

Prayers	77—R. W. Emerson.
(Metrical Prayer)	79—H. D. Thoreau.
(Prayer)	80—Junius Alcott.
To Shakespeare	81—W. E. Channing.
Veeshnoo Sarma	82—R. W. Emerson.
(Lines)	85
Fourierism and the Socialists	86—R. W. Emerson.
The Evening Choir	97—Jones Very.
The World	99—Jones Very.
Chardon Street and Bible Conven- tions	100—R. W. Emerson.
The Two Dolons	112—Ch. N. Newcomb.
Agriculture of Massachusetts	123—R. W. Emerson.
Outward Bound	126—B. P. Hunt.
Record of the Months	127
Borrow's Zinali	127—R. W. Emerson?
Lockhart's Spanish Ballads	128—R. W. Emerson?
Colton's Tecumseh	129—R. W. Emerson?
Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales	130
Hawthorne's Stories for Child- ren	131
Cambridge Miscellany	131
Short Notices	131
Intelligence	132
<i>Wilkes's Exploring Expedition</i>	132—R. W. Emerson.
<i>Association of State Geologists</i>	133—R. W. Emerson.
<i>Harvard University</i>	133—R. W. Emerson.
(Wordsworth's New Poems)	135—R. W. Emerson.
(Tennyson and Henry Taylor)	135—R. W. Emerson.
Schelling in Berlin	136—R. W. Emerson.
New Jerusalem Church	136

VOLUME III. NUMBER 2.

Romaic and Rhine Ballads	137—Margaret Fuller.
The Black Knight	180—H. D. Thoreau.
Lectures on the Times: The Con- servative	181—R. W. Emerson.
The Inward Morning	198—H. D. Thoreau.
Free Love	199—H. D. Thoreau.

The Poet's Delay	200—H. D. Thoreau.
Rumours from an Æolian Harp	200—H. D. Thoreau.
Hollis Street Council	201—Theodore Parker.
The Moon	222—H. D. Thoreau.
To the Maiden in the East	222—H. D. Thoreau.
The Summer Rain	224—H. D. Thoreau.
The Artist	225—C. P. Cranch.
English Reformers	227—R. W. Emerson.
James Pierrepont Greaves	247—Charles Lane.
Dirge	256—W. E. Channing.
Cromwell	258—Charles Lane.
The Poet	264—W. E. Channing.
Lines	265
Saadi	265—R. W. Emerson.
The Gallery	269—Samuel G. Ward.
Record of the Months	273
Tennyson's Poems	273—Margaret Fuller.
Brownson's Letter to Dr. Chan- ning	276—R. W. Emerson.
Smyth's Lectures on History	277
Editor's Table	278
Heraud's Lectures	279
French Journals	279
Schelling in Berlin	280

VOLUME III. NUMBER 3.

James Pierrepont Greaves (con- tinued)	281—Charles Lane.
Lectures on the Times: The Tran- scendentalist	297—R. W. Emerson.
A Song of Spring	313—W. E. Channing.
Discoveries in the Nubian Pyra- mids (from the German of Dr. Carus)	314—Elizabeth Hoar.
Anna	326—W. E. Channing.
To Eva at the South	327—R. W. Emerson.
The Brook	328—C. S. Tappan.
The River	329—W. E. Channing.
Life	329—W. E. Channing.

To —	330—W. E. Channing.
The Laws of Menu	331—W. E. Channing.
Death	340—W. E. Channing.
The Life and Character of Dr. Follen	343—Theodore Parker.
The Prometheus Bound (trans- lated)	363—H. D. Thoreau.
Literary Intelligence	387
(<i>Death of Dr. Channing</i>)	387—R. W. Emerson.
(German Topics)	387
(German Letter)	387
Shelling's Introductory Lecture in Berlin (translated)	398—F. H. Hedge.
Record of the Months	404
Life of Richter	404
An Essay on Transcendentalism	406—Ch. Lane.
Letters of Schiller	411
Fables of La Fontaine	413
Confessions of St. Augustine	414—R. W. Emerson.
(Notices of Books)	415
Goethe and Swedenborg	416

VOLUME III. NUMBER 4.

A. Bronson Alcott's Works	417—Charles Lane.
Canova	454—Margaret Fuller.
Anacreon (Eleven Poems trans- lated)	484—H. D. Thoreau.
What is Beauty?	490—L. M. Child.
Sayings of Confucius (selected)	493—H. D. Thoreau.
George Keats	495—J. F. Clarke.
To a Stray Fowl	505—H. D. Thoreau.
Orphics: I. Smoke. II. Haze	505—H. D. Thoreau.
Sonnets	506
To —	507—W. E. Channing.
To —	507—W. E. Channing.
The Friends	509—W. E. Channing.
Europe and European Books	511—R. W. Emerson.
A Leaf from "A Voyage to Porto Rico"	522—C. C. Emerson?

Dark Ages	527—H. D. Thoreau.
Friendship. From Chaucer's "Ro- maunt of the Rose"	529—Selected by H. D. Thoreau.
Record of the Months	532
Bremer's Neighbours	532
Bulwer's Last of the Barons . .	532
Fetes' Music Explained	533
<i>Borrow's Bible in Spain</i>	534—R. W. Emerson.
<i>Browning's Paracelsus</i>	535—R. W. Emerson. †
Zschokke's Sleep Walker	535
Heraud's Life of Savonarola . .	536—Charles Lane.
Literary Intelligence	541
(German Letter)	541—C. S. Wheeler.
Catalogue of Books (brought by Alcott and Lane from Eng- land)	545—A. B. Alcott.

VOLUME IV. NUMBER 1.

The Great Lawsuit	1—Margaret Fuller.
The Youth of the Poet and the Painter	48—W. E. Channing.
Ethnical Scriptures. Desatir . .	59
Spring	62
Abou Ben Adhem	63—Leigh Hunt.
The Earth	64—W. E. Channing.
Social Tendencies	65—Charles Lane.
A Song of Death	87—George W. Curtis.
Notes from the Journal of a Scholar	88—C. C. Emerson.
Manhood	92—Charles A. Dana.
Gifts	93—R. W. Emerson.
Past and Present	96—R. W. Emerson.
An Old Man	103—W. E. Channing.
To Rhea	104—R. W. Emerson.
The Journey	106—W. E. Channing.
Notes on Art and Architecture . .	107—Samuel G. Ward.
The Glade	115—W. E. Channing.
Voyage to Jamaica	116—B. P. Hunt.
Record of the Months	134

Pierpont's Anti-Slavery Poems	134—R. W. Emerson.
Garrison's Poems	134—R. W. Emerson.
Coffin's America	134—R. W. Emerson.
Channing's Poems	135—R. W. Emerson.
Bremer's Holy Family	135
Intelligence	135
Fruitlands.	135—A. B. Alcott.
To Correspondents	136—R. W. Emerson.

VOLUME IV. NUMBER 2.

Hennell on the Origin of Christ- ianity	137—Th. Parker.
A Day with the Shakers	165—Charles Lane.
The Youth of the Poet and the Painter (continued)	174—W. E. Channing.
Autumn	186—W. E. Channing.
Social Tendencies (continued)	188—Charles Lane.
Ethnical Scriptures: Chinese Four Books	205—H. D. Thoreau.
Via Sacra	210—Ch. A. Dana.
A Winter Walk	211—H. D. Thoreau.
The Three Dimensions	226—R. W. Emerson.*
Voyage to Jamaica (continued)	227—B. P. Hunt.
The Mother's Grief	244
Sweep Ho!	245—Ellen Hooper.
The Sail	246—William A. Tappan.
The Comic	247—R. W. Emerson.
Ode to Beauty	257—R. W. Emerson.
Allston's Funeral	259—W. E. Channing.
To the Muse	260—W. E. Channing.
William Tell's Song	261—W. E. Channing.
A Letter	262—R. W. Emerson.
New Books	270
The Huguenots	270
Longfellow's Spanish Student	270—R. W. Emerson?†
Percival's Poems	271—R. W. Emerson. †
(Notes of Books)	272

VOLUME IV. NUMBER 3.

The Youth of the Poet and the Painter (continued)	273—W. E. Channing.
Translation of Dante	285—Samuel G. Ward.
Homer, Ossian, Chaucer	290—H. D. Thoreau.
Lines	306—Ellen Hooper.
The Modern Drama	307—Margaret Fuller.
To R. B. (Robert Bartlett)	349—Charles A. Dana.
Autumn Woods	350—W. E. Channing.
Brook Farm	351—Charles Lane.
Tantalus	357—R. W. Emerson.
The Fatal Passion: A Dramatic Sketch	364—W. E. Channing.
Interior or Hidden Life	373—Charles Lane.
Pindar (Note and Translations)	379—H. D. Thoreau.
The Preaching of Buddha (selections)	391—H. D. Thoreau.
Eros	401—R. W. Emerson.
Ethnical Scriptures. Hermes Trismegistus	402—H. D. Thoreau.
The Times: A Fragment	405—R. W. Emerson.
Critical Notices	
Child's Letters from New York	
Channing's Present	
Hopkins's Address	
Deutsche Schnellpost	

VOLUME IV. NUMBER 4.

Immanuel Kant	409—J. Elliot Cabot.
Life in the Woods	415
The Emigrants. From Freiligrath	425—Ch. T. Brooks.
The Youth of the Poet and the Painter (continued)	427—W. E. Channing.
The Twin Loves	455—Samuel G. Ward.
Dialogue	458—Margaret Fuller.
The Consolers	469—Samuel G. Ward.
To Readers	470—W. E. Channing.
The Death of Shelley	471—W. E. Channing.

A Song of the Sea	472—W. E. Channing.
To the Poets	473—W. E. Channing.
Fourierism	473—E. P. Peabody.
The Young American	484—R. W. Emerson.
Herald of Freedom	507—H. D. Thoreau.
Fragment of Pindar (translated) .	513—H. D. Thoreau.
The Tragic	515—R. W. Emerson.
Saturday and Sunday among the Creoles	521
The Moorish Prince. From Freiligrath	525—C. T. Brooks.
The Visit	528—R. W. Emerson.
Ethnical Scriptures. Chaldean Oracles	529
Millennial Church	537—Charles Lane.
Notice of "Human Nature" . . .	540





INDEX.

A

- Adirondacs, The*, poem, 59, 64, 69
 Æsop, 184
 Agassiz, J. L. R., 64
 Alcott, A. B., 104, 105, 112, 113, 119,
 122, 128, 136, 137
American Scholar, The, essay on, 9
 Anti-Slavery, 99-111, 221-224
 Argyll, Duke of, 156
Aristocracy, lecture on, 239
 Arnold, Matthew, 21, 96-98, 108, 182,
 216, 219, 220
Art of Life, article by F. H. Hedge, 129

B

- Bacchus*, poem, 216
 Bacon, 7
 Bagehot, Walter, 161, 164
 Bentham, Jeremy, 36
 Birrell, Augustine, 22
Blackwood's Magazine, 166
Brahma, poem, 67, 219
 Brandes, Dr. George, 192
 Brook Farm, 102-106
 Brown University, 4
 Brownell, W. C., 217
 Burroughs, John, 224

C

- Cabot, James Elliot, 34, 224, 231
 California, trip to, 228
 Carlyle, Thomas, 22, 52, 57, 76-93, 157,
 159, 164, 166, 201, 230, 236, 242,
 247

- Celestial Love*, poem, 244
 Cervantes, 184
 Chadwick, Dr. J. W., 121
 Channing, Wm. E., 20, 28, 36, 142
Character, poem, 59
 Charron, 235
 Chaucer, 5, 189
 Cheney, Mrs., 11
 Cicero, 18
 Clough, A. H., 157, 158, 160
 Coleridge, S. T., 37, 113
 Commonplace Book, Emerson's, 8, 9, 18
Conduct of Life, 8, 184, 243
Conservative, The, essay on, 144
 Cornwall, Barry, 158
 Cruikshank, George, 158
Culture, essay on, 10
 Curtis, Burrell, 105
 Curtis, George William, 127

D

- Dæmonic Love, The*, poem, 32, 61
Days, poem, 275
 De Quincey, Thomas, 158-160
Dial, The, 40, 101, 112-154
Diamond Necklace, The, Carlyle's, 88
 Dickens, Charles, 158
 Divinity School, 27
 Divinity School Address, 43-49, 52

E

- Edinburgh Review, The*, 37
Education, essay on, 2
 Eliot, George, 124, 125

Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies, address on, 109
 Emerson, Charles, 29, 93, 128
 Emerson, Edward, 29, 153, 201, 226
 Emerson, Mary Moody, 2, 4, 9, 10, 19, 26
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, birth, 1; childhood, 2-4; at college, 4-9; manner in youth, 11; preparation for the ministry, 18-33; on health, 28, 29; religion, 34-56; on nature, 57-75; relations with Carlyle, 76-91; loss of his eldest son, 92; loss of his brother Charles, 93; as preacher at East Lexington, 94; on culture, 98; on Anti-Slavery, 99-111, 221-224; on Brook Farm, 102-106; contributor to *The Dial*, 112-154; editor of *The Dial*, 138-154; visit to England, 155-182; on *Representative Men*, 182-201; poems, 201-220; as a citizen, 224; closing years, 221-233; trip to California, 228; house burned, 228; third visit to Europe, 229; contribution from friends, 229; return to Concord, 230; failure of memory, 231; last illness, 231; his art, 232
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, Life of, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, 13
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, memoir of, by James Elliot Cabot, 2, 10
 Emerson, Ruth Haskins (Emerson's mother), 2
 Emerson, William, 25, 27
 Emerson, Rev. William, 1
Emerson's Works, Centenary Edition of, 153
 England, first visit to, 57, 109; second visit to, 155-182
English Traits, 162, 164, 169, 244
Essays, 85, 87, 101, 118, 235
 Everett, Edward, 20
Examiner, London, 156
Experience, essay on, 6
Experience, poem, 215

F

Fiske, John, 69
Frederick the Great, Carlyle's, 90, 91

French Revolution, Carlyle's, 82, 83, 91
 Froude, J. A., 160
 Fuller, Margaret, 12, 113, 123, 125, 128, 135-138, 140-142, 146
 Furness, Dr., 4

G

Garnett, Dr. Richard, 162, 200-234
Gifts, essay on, 229
 Gladstone, Wm. E., 230
 Goethe, 7, 113, 199, 201
 Grimm, Hermann, 78, 234

H

Harvard University, 4
 Hawthorne, Julian, 168
 Helps, Arthur, 158, 164
Henry VIII., Shakespeare's rhythm of, 192
Hero-Worship, Carlyle's, 241-243
Heroism, essay on, 98
 Higginson, Thomas W., 122
 Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 13, 191, 193, 204, 225
 Howitt, William and Mary, 156
 Hunt, Leigh, 158

I

Ideals of Every-Day Life, Dwight's, 135
 Illinois, 183
Intellect, poem, 59

J

James, Henry, 22, 232
 Jerrold, Douglas, 156

K

Keats, George, 146
 Keats, John, 146
 Kirkland, Dr. John Thornton, 8

L

- Landor, Walter Savage, 170; letter from, 172-179
Letter to a Theological Student, George Ripley, 130
Letters and Social Aims, 231
Literary Ethics, 67
 Longfellow, Henry W., 4
 Lovejoy, Elijah, 99
 Lowell, Charles Russell, 153
 Lowell, James Russell, 4, 35, 64, 95, 135

M

- Macaulay, T. B., 158
 Maeterlinck, Maurice, 251
Man, the Reformer, 93, 101
 Manchester, Emerson's after-dinner speech at, 181
May-Day, poem, 63, 212, 213, 227
Merlin, poem, 208, 211
 Michigan, 183
Middlemarch, 125
 Middlesex Association of Ministers, 27
Mind and Manners of the XIXth Century, lectures on, 167
Miscellanies, Carlyle's, 83
Monadnoc, poem, 60
Monadnoc Afar, poem, 74
 Montaigne, 5, 7, 9, 201-203, 235, 241
 Montégut, Émile, 235-247
 Morley, John, 21, 242, 245
Musketaquid, poem, 62

N

- Napoleon, 190, 193, 196
Natural History of the Intellect, lectures on, 227, 228
Natural History of Massachusetts, Thoreau's, 138
Nature, 57, 58, 186
Nature, couplet on, 215
Nature, essay on, 17, 23, 68
Notes from the Journal of a Scholar, Charles Emerson's, 128

O

- Ode to Beauty*, poem, 209
Old Age, essay on, 228
Orphic Sayings, Alcott's, 128, 131, 133
 Oxford, 159

P

- Paris, 167, 235
 Parker, Theodore, 44, 112, 120, 125
Past and Present, Carlyle's, 84
 Patmore, Coventry, 158
 Peabody, Elizabeth, 112
 Phi Beta Kappa speech, 95, 98
 Philadelphia, 183
 Pittsburgh, 183
 Plato, 5, 15, 196, 199
 Plutarch, 5, 7
Poems, 244
Power, essay on, 28

R

- Religion, 34, 40, 56
Religion of Beauty, Dwight's, 128
Representative Men, 156, 183, 201, 240
Revue des Deux Mondes, 235-250
Rhodora, *The*, poem, 216
 Ripley, George, 105, 112, 122
 Robinson, Crabb, 157
 Rodni, 188
 Rogers, Samuel, 158
 Rossetti, Wm., 157
 Royce, Professor, 71
 Roz, M., on Emerson, 244, 246

S

- Saadi*, poem, 142, 207
 Sanborn, F. B., 110
Sartor Resartus, 77, 81, 82
 Saturday Club, the, 225
 Second Church, the, 93
Self-Reliance, essay on, 168
 Seneca, 235
 Shakespeare, 7, 9, 184, 189, 193, 194, 235

Shaler, Professor, 72
Silence, poem, 130
Society and Solitude, 3, 8, 225
 Socrates, 184, 235, 250
Sphinx, The, poem, 53, 132, 134
 Stafford House, 159
 Stephenson, George, 158
 Stevenson, R. L., 202, 203
 Stillman, W. J., 64, 65
 Stonehenge, 164
 Swedenborg, Emanuel, 200, 241
Sympathy, poem, by Thoreau, 128

T

Tact, poem on, 12
 Talma, 189
 Tennyson, Alfred, 158
Terminus, poem, 227
 Thackeray, W. M., 155, 157, 166
 Thayer, Professor, 13
Theophrastus Such, 125
 Thoreau, H. D., 58, 105, 126, 138,
 140
Thoughts on Modern Literature, 127
Threnody, poem, 60, 93, 206, 210,
 217, 218

Times, lecture on the, 106, 138
Transcendentalist, The, essay on, 145
Trésor des Humbles, Le, Maeterlinck's,
 251-263
 Tucker, Ellen, 34
 Tyndall, Professor, 73

U

Unitarian Church, the, 36

V

Vanity Fair, Thackeray, 157
Visit, The, poem, 153

W

Ware, Henry, 34
Wealth, essay on, 19
 Wiley & Putnam, firm of, 85
 Winchester, 159, 165
Wood-Notes, poem, 130
 Woodbury, Professor, 21
 Wordsworth, William, 113, 159, 182,
 216, 219, 220



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